

Various documents related to the Kinderhook Plates

Tracing of Kinderhook Plate by
Brigham Young in journal

May 3, 1843

May 4th 1843

I took this at

Joseph Smith's

house

found near

Quincy

Wes:

6/11/12

Here you are.
Thanks for another copy of your
fascinating paper. You even went
me the full 66pp. text.

I would like to see a real
answere to this--not the quickie
you got in Odgen.

Sorry to learn of the clot--had
one twice myself in my legs.
Condolences.

J. M. Hall

The names of those
Present at the orgi-
nation of the Church
of Jesus Christ of L-
day Saints in
1830--on the 6 day
of April

Joseph Smith the Jr.
Oliver Rockwell
Joseph Smith Jun
Hyrum Smith
Samuel H. Smith
Oliver Cowdrey
Joseph H. Smith
William H. Smith
at Quincy Ill.

May 3- 1843

I took this at
Joseph Smith's
house
found near
Quincy

from page 3 of my
writing on the
manuscript
of the same

✓
noted
check flat gets
this perfectly

Letter from Wilbur Fugate to
James Cobb revealing the
Kinderhook conspiracy and
fraud.
April 1878

Wilbur Fugate to James T. Cobb, April 8, 1878, in the
A.T. Schroeder Collection, State Historical Society of
Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin.

[1878]

Mound Station, Illinois.

Apr. 8. 1878.

Mr J. Y. Cobb:-

I received your letter in regard to those plates, and will say in answer, they are a humbug, gotten up by Robert Wiley. Bridge Whittom (a blacksmith) and myself. B-Whittom is dead, Wiley may be living, he was a Missourian, none of the nine persons who signed the certificate knew the secret excepting Wiley and myself. There were two Mormon Elders present when the plates were found, their names were Ward & Sharp. A man by the name of Savage (of Quincy) under an assumed name borrowed the plates of Wiley to show to his friends there, and took them to Jo. Smith, after they were returned, Wiley gave them to Prof. McDowell of St. Louis Mo. for his Museum, but since McDowell's death, we heard they were taken to Chicago Medical College, and placed in the Museum, by visiting to Prof.

John Hodgson of St Louis Mo. you may find out
where they are, and also if Wiley is still living
he was a graduate of that College - Wiley
Dr Harris was not a Mormon, he was a chemist and
he took the rust off the plates when found - Dr is dead
Wiley was not a mormon, The plates were cut ^{out of copper}
by a blacksmith (Bridge Whifton) Wiley and myself
made the hieroglyphics, a man by the name
of Newman saw the plates before they were put in
the mound, but whether he is living or not? I do not
know. I do not know any man by the name of
Roberts. I will say in conclusion that the plates
were made simply for a joke. I believe I have
answered all your questions, and given you
the particulars concerning them.

Yours Respy

W. Fugate.

P.S. As Father is too old and nervous to write, he
requested me to answer, and the above is written
as he directed.

Walter Fugate,

Your letter came to Mr Sterling and as we had moved from there several years ago, we did not get it until a few days ago, consequently the delay in answering.

I will give the reason or cause of the joke we were reading "Pratt's prophecy" that truth yet was to spring up out of the earth, and as they were digging at Kinderhook we concluded to make the plates, and dug down about 8 feet and came to a flat rock and put them under it they were fastened together with rust made of nitric acid, lead, and rusty iron. The Hieroglyphics were impressions made in beeswax, and filled with nitric acid, and placed on the plates.

He understood Dr Smith said they would make a book of 1200 pages but he would not agree to translate them until they were sent to the Antiquarian Society at Philadelphia France, and England, they were sent and the answer was that there were no such

Hieroglyphics known, and if there ever had
been, they had long since passed away,
then Smith began his translation

W. Fugate

Letter from Hodgen to
James Cobb regarding
Kinderhook plates.
November 1879

DRS. HODGEN & MUDD
302 N. 14th Street.

St. Louis, Nov. 28 1879

Mr J F Lamb
W. Va.

The Platoon from Heath's Co were deposited
with B^yrd & O'Connell - & remained there until
the morn. - His Com. Wm John J McNamee
of this City has them now.

At the time of the discovery I was
a boy living in Pike Co/ Ill. —
Kearney (who is dead). & Grabb
who was digging while they were found.

Yours truly,
J. S. Coolidge

P.S. I know the man who made the plates -

Runderhook Plates A.T.

Letter from George S Romney
confirming authenticity of
Kinderhook plate located at the
Chicago Historical Society
Museum
July 1933

DATE RECEIVED

READ BY

L. H. S.

VALSH

JAHN

MURRAY

J. S.

CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

OFFICE OF NORTHERN STATES MISSION

GEORGE S. ROMNEY, PRESIDENT

2555 N. SAWYER AVENUE

CHICAGO, ILL.

July 24, 1933

Mr. J.E. Jahn
Chicago Historical Society
Lincoln Park
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Mr. Jahn:

I received your communication of July 20th in regard to the Kinderhook plate. I thank you very kindly for the material you sent to me.

I recently had the privilege of examining this plate at the Historical Society. We placed paper on the plate and traced the figures. I then compared them with the facsimili copies that are found on the pages of the History of the Latter Day Saints Church. There is a close resemblance between the characters on the plate in your museum and that which is said to be a facsimili copy in the Church History. But since the plate is not exactly the same size nor are the figures exactly like those in the History, I am lead to think that probably they were not facsimili copies that were put in the History book but merely free-hand drawings; not any too carefully made. Since the characters on the two, however, are so much alike I am convinced that the plate in the Chicago Historical Society is one of the original ones that was had by Joseph Smith.

Let me again thank you.

Very sincerely yours,

Geo S Romney

GSR:LFB

Letter from Church
Historian acknowledging
receipt of copy of
Kinderhook Plate
January 1960

111: Kinderhook Plates

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS
OFFICE OF THE CHURCH HISTORIAN
47 E. SOUTH TEMPLE STREET
SALT LAKE CITY 11, UTAH

25 January 1960

James D. Bales
Harding College
Searcy, Arkansas

Dear Sir:

I am sorry that I have taken so long to answer your letter. We appreciate the copy of the Kinderhook Plate that you sent to us. We did not know that any were in existence.

I am sending you an Autostat Copy of a page of the Millennial Star Vol. 21, page 40. Also a couple pages from the Times and Seasons publication Vol. 4, pages 186 and 187. We do not have much information on these plates.

This page was from the Chicago Historical Society. I sent the the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints a copy
J. D. Bales

The reference that is contained on the page you sent, pertaining to Millennial Star, Vol. 19 page 632 does not have anything to do with the Kinderhook plates. This reference deals with the following:

"More gold plates discovered.--Mr. Benjamin E. Styles of Cincinnati, Ohio, while excavating the earth for a cistern, in the year 1847, found, a few feet above high water mark on the Ohio River, A Gold Plate. It was thrown out with the loose earth while excavating about nine feet beneath the surface.

"Said plate is of fine gold, three or four inches in length, averaging about three-fourths of an inch in width, about one-eighth of an inch in thickness, with the edges scalloped. In the face of which was beautifully set another plate of the same material, and fastened together by two pins, running through both. This latter plate is full of ancient raised characters, beautifully engraved upon its surface; the whole exhibiting fine workmanship.

"The plate was examined by Dr. Wise, a very learned Rabbi of the Jewish Synagogue in Cincinnati, and editor of a Hebrew paper there, who pronounced the characters to be mostly ancient Egyptian. The following as a fac-simile of the Plate and its ancient characters. (There is then two copies printed.)

"We do hereby certify that we did print from a gold plate, the above fac-simile, handed to us by Mr. Benjamin Styles, which he says he found while digging for a cistern in Cincinnati, Ohio.

"No 1 is a frame of gold containing a thin plate, No. 2, and appears to have been executed by a very superior workman.

Drake and Co. Printers,
St. Louis, Missouri."

Page 2.

The other reference on this page in the Millennial Star is a quote from Lord Kingsborough's Mexican Antiquities Vol. 8 page 357,358.

I am sure that you would like to get the correct information on this subject.

Information on the Autostat machine can be had from the American Photocopy Equipment Company. General Office 2100 Dempster Street, Evanston, Illinois.

Thanks again for the information that you sent to us.

Sincerely,

Lauritz G. Petersen

Lauritz G. Petersen
Asst. Librarian.

Improvement Era article on the
Kinderhook Plates
affirming their authenticity as
proof of Joseph Smith's prophetic
power

Sept, 1962



The Improvement Era

September 1962

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Official organ of the Priesthood Quorums, Mutual Improvement Associations, Ward Teachers, Music Committee, Department of Education, and other agencies of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

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The Improvement Era Offices, 135 South State Street, Salt Lake City, 11, Utah

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ART AND PHOTO CREDITS:

Art
642-645 Dave Burton
649 Virginia Sargent
655 Dale Bryner
Steve Osborne
All other art—Ralph Reynolds Studio
Photos:
638 Ralph Clark
639 Church Information Service

THE COVER:

"We thank thee, O God, for a prophet To guide us in these latter days . . ." is a favorite hymn often sung with much feeling in the Church. September is the birth month of President David O. McKay, Camera-man Ralph Clark (whose photograph of the late President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., appeared on an Era cover a year ago) caught President McKay in the board room at the Church Administration Building, a room well known to the President, as he there conducts many meetings with the General Authorities and others.

In this issue President McKay shares with you "A Personal Testimony," see page 628; and President Hugh B. Brown has penned a birthday tribute to the President, beginning on page 638. Additional full-color photographs accompany that article.

Cover lithographed in full color by Deseret News Press.

THE KINDERHOOK PLATES

WELBY W. RICKS
PRESIDENT UNIVERSITY
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
SOCIETY, BYU



A recent rediscovery of one of the Kinderhook plates which was examined by Joseph Smith, Jun., reaffirms his prophetic calling and reveals the false statements made by one of the finders.

A few years ago, two non-LDS professional engravers, Stanley B. Hill and Edward Pwiiski walked into the Chicago Historical Society and asked to view a bell-shaped brass plate known as a Kinderhook plate. Their purpose was to determine whether it had been engraved with a pointed instrument or etched with acid. What they found solved a seventy-four-year-old controversy and put the plates back into the category of "genuine" which Joseph Smith, Jun., had said they were in the first place.

What were the Kinderhook plates? How did Joseph Smith, Jun., become connected with them, and why was there a controversy over them? The following is the story which should be of interest to every Latter-day Saint.

On April 23, 1843, a group of men excavated an old earth mound just outside the town of Kinderhook, Illinois, and came up with a most interesting find. The excavation was headed by Robert Wiley, a local merchant of the town who had become extremely curious about the possible contents of the old mound ever since he had dreamed of finding treasure there. After digging down about twelve feet, they came upon "fire burned rock, charcoal, ashes, and badly decomposed human bones. Near the encephalon a bundle was found that consisted of six plates of brass of a bell shape, each having a hole near the small end, a ring through them all and clasped with two clasps."

The plates appeared to have some kind of writing on them but were so badly oxidized they could not be clearly distinguished until Dr. W. P. Harris, MD, treated them with a dilute solution of sulphuric acid which made them perfectly clear. They were completely covered with "hieroglyphics" on both sides.

A certificate stating the facts of the find was drawn up and signed by nine of the men present and sent to nearby newspapers. Since Nauvoo was only a short distance away, the church periodical *Times and Seasons*, received the story quickly and published it with all details. Drawings of the plates as well as of the certificates were printed along with the story as related to them by the finders.

Interest ran high as to the meaning of the writing on the plates. The editor of the *Quincy Whig*, a non-Mormon paper wrote: "... By whom these plates were deposited must ever remain a secret, unless someone skilled in deciphering hieroglyphics may be found to unravel the mystery. Some pretend to say that Smith, the Mormon leader, has the ability to read them. If he has, he will confer a great favor on the public by removing the mystery which hangs over them. A person (Continued on page 656)

Left: Plate number 5 of the Kinderhook Plates. Below: Same plate reverse side. A sizeable acid blotch appears on this side which was not there originally. It is entirely probable that Dr. Harris did this in his attempt to clean the plates with sulphuric acid. (Photos by permission of the Chicago Historical Society.)



Following is the notarized certificate of two Chicago engravers, Stanley B. Hill and Edward Pwiiski, stating that "The plate was engraved with a pointed instrument and not etched with acid."

June, 25, 1903

To whom it may concern:

On the above date, we have personally examined a Kinderhook Plate in the Chicago Historical Society and to the best of our knowledge this Plate was engraved with a pointed instrument and not etched with acid.

Stanley B. Hill - engraver
Edward Pwiiski - engraver

STATE OF ILLINOIS } SS
COUNTY OF COOK }

Subscribed and sworn to before me
this 26th day of June, 1903.

Henry H. Harris
Notary Public

The Kinderhook Plates

(Continued from page 637)

present when the plates were found remarked that it would go to prove the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, which it undoubtedly will.

"... The plates above alluded to were exhibited in this city last week, and are now, we understand, in Nauvoo, subject to the inspection of the Mormon Prophet. The public

curiosity is greatly excited; and if Smith can decipher the hieroglyphics on the plates, he will do more towards throwing light on the early history of this continent than any man now living."

John Taylor, editor of the *Times and Seasons*, in referring to the above statement said: "... We think that he, Joseph Smith, Jun., has done that already in translating and publishing the Book of Mormon and would advise the gentleman and all interested to read for themselves and

understand. We have no doubt, however, but Mr. Smith will be able to translate them."

Mr. Wiley was not anxious to let the plates go to the Prophet since he hoped for a translation from the learned world. Eventually, however, a Mr. Savage borrowed the plates to show to some of his literary friends at which time they were shown to Joseph Smith, Jun.

Joseph Smith, Jun., pronounced them genuine and translated a part of them. He said, as found in his diary dated Monday, May 1, 1843: "*I have translated a portion of them and find they contain the history of the person with whom they were found. He was a descendant of Ham, through the loins of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and that he received his kingdom from the Ruler of heaven and earth.*" (DHC 5:372. Italics added.)

The plates were returned to Robert Wiley who eventually gave them to Professor McDowell for the McDowell Museum of St. Louis, Missouri, where they remained until the Civil War when the Second Iowa Reserve sacked the museum and stole or destroyed its contents. Thus the plates disappeared.

For thirty-six years the plates went undisputed, but in 1879, Mr. Wilbur Fugate, one of the men present at the time of the find, wrote a letter to Mr. James T. Cobb stating that the plates were a "Humbug."

The following is said to be a copy of that letter:

Mound Station, Ill.
June 30, 1879

Mr. Cobb:

I received your letter in regard to those *plates*, and will say in answer that they are a HUMBUG, gotten up by Robert Wiley, Bridge Whitton and myself. Whitton is dead. I do not know whether Wiley is or not. None of the nine persons who signed the certificate knew the secret, except Wiley and I.

We read in Pratt's prophecy that "Truth is yet to spring out of the earth." We concluded to prove the prophecy by way of a joke. We soon made our plans and executed them. Bridge Whitton cut them out of some pieces of copper; Wiley and I made the hieroglyphics by making impressions on beeswax and filling them with acid and putting it on the plates. When they were finished we put them together with rust made

Have faith in the future . . .

RICHARD L. EVANS



With so many uncertainties and so many opportunities, we should like to say some things today to those who have come to commencement. Perhaps this is the shortest and most reassuring thing we could say: Have faith in the future. Faith in the future is not only desirable but absolutely essential to peace and to progress, and to preparation. If there were no faith, and no real reason for faith, there would be no real point in preparation. "There is no great future for any people whose faith has burned out,"¹ said Rufus M. Jones. "Don't be a cynic, . . ." said Emerson. "Don't waste yourself in rejection, . . ." Carlyle commented: "We have our mind given us, not that it may cavil and argue, but that it may see into something, give us clear belief and understanding about something, whereon we are then to proceed to act. . . . Truly it is a sad thing for a people, as for a man, to fall into scepticism, into . . . insincerity; not to know a Sincerity when they see it. . . . The world does exist; the world has truth in it, or it would not exist! . . . A man lives by believing something; . . . a man who knows, as of old, that this world is a Truth, and no Plausibility and Falsity; that he himself is alive, . . . and that the world is alive. . . . Do not sink yourself in boundless bottomless abysses of Doubt, of wretched god-forgetting Unbelief; . . . It lies there clear, for whosoever will take the spectacles off his eyes and honestly look, to know! . . . A man lives by believing something. . . ." ² And so to those who have come to a time of commencement we would say: Don't be discouraged; don't become cynical; don't be in too big a hurry; be patient. The Creator is still in command. There are still principles; there are still causes and consequences; there are still opportunities; there is still limitless progress to be made, truth to be discovered, peace to be achieved, solid purposes to be pursued. Continue to learn. Prepare as fully and solidly and purposefully as you can. Walk from day to day with a willingness to work, with a consistent, sincere living of life, with belief in the goodness and purpose of life, and with faith in the future. "The future belongs to those who prepare for it."³

¹Rufus M. Jones (1863-1948), American Quaker educator.

²Emerson.

³Carlyle, *On Heroes*.

⁴Quoted by Charles B. Shuman, Annual Address of the President of the American Farm Bureau Federation, 1960, accredited to Emerson.

"The Spoken Word," from Temple Square presented over KSL and the Columbia Broadcasting System, June 3, 1962. Copyright 1962.

of nitric acid, old iron and lead, and bound them with a piece of hoop iron, covering then completely with the rust.

Our plans worked admirably. A certain Sunday was appointed for the digging. The night before, Wiley went to the Mound where he had previously dug to the depth of about eight feet, there being a flat rock that sounded hollow beneath, and put them under it. On the following morning quite a number of citizens were there to assist in the search, there being two Mormon elders present (Marsh and Sharp). The rock was soon removed but some time elapsed before the plates were discovered. I finally picked them up and exclaimed, "A piece of pot metal!" Fayette Grubb snatched them from me and struck them against the rock and they fell to pieces. Dr. Harris examined them and said they had hieroglyphics on them. He took acid and removed the rust and they were soon out on exhibition.

Under this rock (which) was dome-like in appearance (and) about three feet in diameter, there were a few bones in the last stage of decomposition, also a few pieces of pottery and charcoal. There was no skeleton found. Sharp, the Mormon Elder, leaped and shouted for joy and said, Satan had appeared to him and told him not to go (to the diggings), it was a hoax of Fugate and Wiley's, but at a later hour the Lord appeared and told him to go, the treasure was there.

The Mormons wanted to take the plates to Joe Smith, but we refused to let them go. Some time afterward a man assuming the name of Savage, of Quincy, borrowed the plates of Wiley to show to his literary friends there, and took them to Joe Smith. The same identical plates were returned to Wiley, who gave them to Professor McDowell, of St. Louis, for his Museum.

W. Fugate

STATE OF ILLINOIS BROWN COUNTY.

ss

W. Fugate, being first duly sworn, deposes and says that the above letter, containing an account of the plates found near Kinderhook, is true and correct, to the best of his recollection.

W. Fugate

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 30th day of June, 1879.

Jay Brown, J. P.

Anti-Mormons were quick to latch onto Fugate's story and broadcast it to the world and have done so from that day till this. One said: "This nails the prophet down for all eternity." Another felt it would be the death blow to the Church.

Mr. Fugate's tale may seem fairly sound to some, but to others there exist too many peculiarities in the story to accept it.

Let us examine some of those peculiarities:

First, when this letter was written the witnesses were either dead or presumed dead.

Second, the plates had disappeared. They had been gone since

may be satisfactorily answered when one realizes to whom he was writing this letter: Mr. James T. Cobb of Salt Lake City, a bitter anti-Mormon. He had twisted and distorted the truth many times before. Was this another time?

Some correspondence had preceded this. It was during this letter writing period that Mr. Fugate wrote this one declaring the plates a fraud, *not before*. Under these circumstances one is certainly justified in being suspicious of the whole story. Fifth, the original finders said the plates were of *brass*. Mr. Fugate said they were made up "out of some pieces of *copper*."



The Kinderhook Plates, sketched by an unknown artist, and published in the periodical Times and Seasons at Nauvoo in 1843. Reproduced here from the Documentary History of the Church, volume 5, pages 374-376. The six brass plates were found near Kinderhook, in Pike County, Illinois, on April 23, 1843.

the Civil War and were thought to have been destroyed with the museum which housed them. Thus Mr. Fugate was in a pretty safe position to say anything he desired about the plates. Who could dispute him? Third, of the witnesses to the find Mr. Fugate *alone* was the only one to declare the plates fraudulent. The others died without having said anything about a hoax or a joke. If this had really been a hoax, they would have been equally as anxious as he to spring the trap to get their joke. This never happened.

Fourth, Mr. Fugate waited a suspiciously long time, thirty-six years to be exact, which was thirty-five years after the death of his prey, before declaring the plates a "Humbug" when he could have done so within a few weeks after their discovery. Does this sound like a man who is anxiously waiting to catch something in a snare?

Why did he wait so long? What happened in 1879 that brought about this "confession"? Why not some other time? These questions

Sixth, Mr. Fugate left no doubt as to the method Wiley and he had supposedly used in making the characters on the plates. He said, "Wiley and I made the hieroglyphics by making impressions on beeswax and filling them with acid and putting it on the plates." In other words, if his story be true, the plates would have to be etched. No other possibility could exist.

The probability of an ancient inhabitant of America using acid to etch his plates is very, very slim and the likelihood of his using a pointed instrument is very great. Thus it would be natural to suspect that the plates if genuine would be *engraved* rather than *etched*. It is easy to see that Mr. Fugate's testimony could be checked on by a determination of this matter. If they were etched, his testimony could stand, but if engraved his testimony must fall.

To pursue either of these positions requires observation of the plate or plates by specialists who are experienced in noting the difference between etching and engraving. This

had never been done because the plates have not been available. But in recent years an attempt was made to locate the plates. Museums throughout the country were reached by letter. In time one of the plates was located in the Chicago Historical Society at North Avenue and Clark Street. It had come into their possession through Mr. C. A. Gunther who had purchased it from

Dr. F. C. A. Richardson, MD. as "A plate of brass known as one of the only two recognized original plates of the Mormon Bible." (Obviously this was in error since the plates of the Book of Mormon were of gold and were returned to Moroni.) Dr. Richardson had obtained it from the son of Professor McDowell who in turn had received it from a soldier who had taken it from the McDowell

Museum during the Civil War.

The plate is now identified as number 5 of the Kinderhook plates.

With one of the plates now available for investigation the key matter could be cleared up: Were they *etched or engraved?*

Mr. Fugate said Wiley and he had etched the plates. Yet two professional engravers were invited to view the plates in 1953 and give their unbiased opinion on them—which they did freely and without charge. They stated clearly that the plate was *engraved* with a pointed instrument.

The following is their notarized statement:

"The plate was engraved with a pointed instrument and not etched with acid." (See reproduction page 636.)

The plates are now back in their original category of *genuine*.

What scholars may learn from this ancient record in future years or what may be translated by divine power is an exciting thought to contemplate.

This much remains. Joseph Smith, Jun., stands as a true prophet and translator of ancient records by divine means and all the world is invited to investigate the truth which has sprung out of the earth not only of the Kinderhook plates, but of the Book of Mormon as well.

To "a sceptical world . . ."

RICHARD L. EVANS



In speaking last week of commencement, we talked of belief and of faith in the future, and quoted some sentences from Carlyle to which, repeating some, we would add others: "... No man adequate to do anything," he said, "but is first of all in right earnest about it; what I call a sincere man. I should say sincerity, a deep, great, genuine sincerity, is the first characteristic of all men in any way heroic. . . . He must have truth; truth which he feels to be true. How shall he stand otherwise? . . . Belief I define to be the healthy act of a man's mind. . . . Doubt, truly, is not itself a crime. Certainly we do not rush out, clutch up the first thing we find, and straightway believe that! All manner of . . . inquiry . . . about all manner of objects, dwells in every reasonable mind. . . . [But] truly it is a sad thing for a people, as for a man, to fall into scepticism, . . . into insincerity; . . . For this world, and for all worlds, what curse is so fatal? . . . For Scepticism, is not intellectual only; it is moral also; a chronic atrophy and disease of the whole soul. . . . It seems to me, you lay your finger here on the heart of the world's maladies when you call it a Sceptical World. . . . It is out of this . . . that the whole tribe of social pestilences . . . have derived their being. . . . Do not sink yourselves in boundless bottomless abysses of Doubt, of wretched god-forgetting Unbelief; . . . A man lives by believing something. . . ."¹ So said Carlyle, and this we would add: The world, the universe, is a living, moving, ever-present evidence of a Creator, of an Intelligence beyond any or all of ours. Life cannot be explained away, nor can causes and consequences, nor can all of nature's marvelous manifestations—nor man—nor his mind. Voltaire said: "If a clock proves the existence of a clockmaker and the world does not prove the existence of a Supreme Architect, then I consent to be called a fool."² To some learned Frenchmen who had proved "by all manner of logic . . . that there could be no God, . . . Napoleon looking up into the stars, answers, 'Very ingenious, Messieurs: but *who made all that?*'"³ "Epochs of faith, are epochs of fruitfulness"; said Goethe, "but epochs of unbelief, . . . are barren. . . ."⁴ With all this before us, God grant us the blessing of being believing, for the world does exist, and so does the universe, and so do we, and so does life, and so do our loved ones, and this is no whim or delusion, and the reality of all this is reason enough for humility, for goodness, for reverence, for respect, for living earnestly, for preparing fully, for keeping the commandments, and for holding to faith in the future.

¹Carlyle, *On Heroes*.

²Voltaire.

³Goethe.

"The Spoken Word," from Temple Square presented over KSL and the Columbia Broadcasting System, June 10, 1962. Copyright 1962.

Your Boy Is Not Alone

(Continued from page 655)

always just plain "Brother" where the Church is concerned. We were pleased to receive recently a letter from church friends in Colorado Springs. They apologized for not knowing my rank when it came to addressing the envelope. That is the nicest compliment they could have given me.

It is important to remember that there are also many "Sergeant Petersons" in every branch of the service. The "Sarge" will have closer daily contact with your son. While not able to show any preference, he will be able to give a "brotherly boost" to sagging spirits during those first rough weeks of basic training.

These are the men to whom your
(Concluded on page 662)

Princeton Physical Study of
Kinderhook Plate
May, 1966

Report of a Physical Study of the Kinderhook Plate Number 5.

George M. Lawrence
Princeton, May, 1966

Introduction

On April 23, 1843, six small metal plates with inscriptions were taken from a mound near Kinderhook, Illinois. W. P. Harris, M.D., a local resident, cleaned the plates with dilute sulfuric acid. These "Kinderhook plates" were eventually examined by Joseph Smith, Jr.¹ and he made a short statement concerning the meaning of the inscriptions and implied the antiquity and authenticity of the plates. However, in 1855 Harris wrote² that three local men, W. Fugate, B. Whitten, (a blacksmith) and R. Wiley had made the plates as a hoax and had later informed him (Harris) of it. In 1879 Fugate wrote that they had used beeswax and nitric acid to make the inscriptions.

If the plates are a hoax, it is of importance to Mormons to prove it with great care, or if they are authentic archeological artifacts they deserve more study than they have received. Apparently only one of the six plates survived the Civil War and is now in the possession of the Chicago Historical Society.

In the 1962 Improvement Era article of note 1, two engravers, Edward Pwiski and Stanley B. Hill³, stated that to the best of their knowledge, the inscriptions on this plate were scratched with a sharp point rather than etched but they give no reasons for their judgement. In order to contribute to the factual knowledge concerning these plates, I have made some non-destructive physical studies of the surviving plate (#5 in the History of the Church facsimilies).⁴

Following is a discussion of the size and composition of the plate and then a study of the markings. It should be stressed that possible tests and observations of the plate have not been exhausted.

Composition and Size

Because the plate was borrowed for non-destructive tests, no "wet" chemical analysis or spectrographic analysis was made. Thus, the exact alloy of the plate is not yet known. However, the density and color of the plate and the results of an X-ray diffraction analysis⁵ put some useful bounds on its composition. The color is somewhere between that of bronze and ordinary yellow brass. (It is not surprising that the original accounts of the plate disagree as to whether it is brass or copper.) The specific gravity is 8.6 ± 0.1 . The angles of 12 X-ray diffraction "lines" show the atomic crystal structure to be face-centered cubic like copper but with an atom spacing 1.27 ± 0.16 per cent larger than copper. Such an increase in the average crystal size is typically caused by the solid solution of other metals in the copper. To be consistent with the measured amount of stretch, the alloy could be a 23% zinc-77% copper brass or an 8% tin-92% copper bronze or copper with similar percentages of several other metals - or a combination of them. The density is consistent with the 23% zinc brass (low brass) but not with the bronze alloy mentioned. A useful, definite, statement is that it is not the natural copper (99% pure) found in objects made by Indians of the Great Lakes Region.

The plate is about 2-7/8" high, weighs 17.65 grams and has an area of 28 sq. cm. The diameter of the hole in the top is 0.126" and is round within 0.001". The metal around the hole bulges, suggesting that the hole was punched.

Perhaps the most striking characteristic of the plate upon visual examination is its good thickness uniformity and local surface flatness compared to the work of preindustrial craftsmen. The thickness of the plate was measured at about 50 points on the surface to an accuracy of 0.0002". The plate has a slight taper, thinning slightly toward the bottom. One may describe the thickness as $0.030" \pm 0.001$ except for the last 1/4" of taper at the bottom, where the plate thins approximately 0.002".

The metal of the plate is fine grained and homogeneous as are modern metals. It has no spring when flexed, like annealed copper. Except for scratches, the surface is smooth as if the plate had been rolled or ground rather than hammered or cast. There is no evidence of corrosion except for the nickel-sized etch blotch on the "reverse" side. This region is quite irregular, is about 0.01" deep, and cuts into the surface along a sharply defined boundary. The sharp edge is characteristic of acid attacking a greasy or waxy surface, whereas acid on a clean metal surface produces feathered edges.

I conclude from the local flatness, the small thickness variation, the basic surface smoothness, and the taper, that the plate was cut from sheet which had been rolled, probably in a direction perpendicular to the length of the plate. The nominal size of the hole and thickness were perhaps 1/8" and 1/32", respectively.

The Inscriptions

The photographs show enlargements of two of the plate inscriptions and two etchings made by myself. To make these etchings, I melted a thin layer of beeswax (paraffin is too brittle) onto a piece of soft copper, scratched "inscriptions" in the wax with the point of a scribe and then etched the exposed metal with a few drops of concentrated nitric acid. The nitric acid tends to stay in drops because the wax is not wet by it. The amount of acid in one drop is enough to produce roughly the proper depth of groove under the drop. The grooves are quite variable in depth and width due to changes in wax depth, scratch point attitude, and time allowed for etching. However, after a few attempts to control the depth, I was able to make more uniform inscriptions than the actual ones. I was not able to control the width as well however.

Some other characteristics of the acid-beeswax process are: Rounded groove ends and bottoms. Soft copper gives less angular groove edges than harder metals such as yellow brass or steel. Upon melting the wax to remove it, the newly etched surface gets covered with a dark brown coating of wax which somewhat obscures the underlying granular structure. If this wax residue is removed, an etched or granulated appearance can be seen. There is an absence of striations (scratches) along the length of the groove. There sometimes is an extra area of etching action when two lines join obliquely - caused by acid working under the narrow wedge of displaced wax between the two lines. Most grooves cross at exactly the same depth with no markings to show which groove was made last.

The flatness of the metal is not disturbed in the neighborhood of the groove. Bubbles formed in the etching process form irregularities or lumps along the length of the groove. The size of these irregularities can be controlled somewhat by "stirring" or diluting the acid.

The above characteristics of this type of etching were found on the actual Kinderhook plate.

The plate has, as "trim," long grooves along the side and bottom edge that could have been made by a sharp knife with some pressure. On these grooves the metal is deformed and traces can be seen on the reverse side. This is not true of the inscriptions though many are deeper than the knife marks. Attempts by me to reproduce the inscriptions by scratching were not successful.

There are, however, two observations which can be used to support the conclusion that the Kinderhook plate was not etched. First, only the more regular of the grooves made by me are as smooth as the Kinderhook plate's. Second, the intersection of the grooves with the surface of the plate is sharper in my etchings than on the Kinderhook plate. The more rounded edges on the Kinderhook plate could be attributed to wear, or secondary tooling, such as running a nail around the inscriptions. The genuine plate grooves were coated with some dark material which unfortunately was not removed or examined because its importance was not realized at the time of the study.

Nitric acid was used by me for etching because hydrochloric and sulfuric acids do not readily attack copper alloys. Dilute sulfuric acid has long been used commercially for removing surface oxides from copper alloys without attacking the metal. It seems most likely that the acid etch mark on the reverse side was made by nitric acid in an attempt to simulate corrosion. Its sharply defined edges and the integrity of the rest of the surface suggests strongly that the surface was waxy or greasy at the time the mark was made.

Summary

The plate is neither pure copper nor ordinary brass. It may be a low zinc brass or a bronze. The dimensions, tolerances, composition and workmanship are consistent with the facilities of an 1843 blacksmith shop and with the fraud stories of the original participants. The characteristics of the inscription grooves can be reproduced in great detail using the simple acid-wax technique, contrary to the judgement of the engravers.

Notes

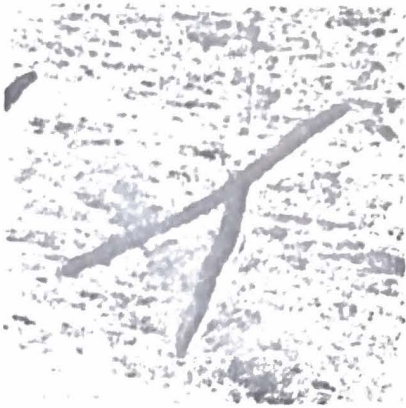
1. Important documents, references, letters, and illustrations are given in: History of the Church, Vol. 5, pp. 372-379, and in W. Ricks, Improvement Era, 636ff, Sept. 1962.

2. Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society, 1912, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 271-273 ... also in James D. Bales, "The Book of Mormon?" Old Paths Book Club, (1958).

3. Kleen-Kut Engravers, Inc., Chicago 34, Ill. Mr. Hill is President of the Company.

4. The study was made in the summer of 1965 under the auspices of the Princeton University Library. We wish to thank Joseph B. Zywicki, Curator, and Clement M. Silvestro, Director, of the Chicago Historical Society for allowing examination of the plate.

5. Done at the Western Electric Co., Princeton, N.J. with the aid of Richard Glenn, a metallurgist.



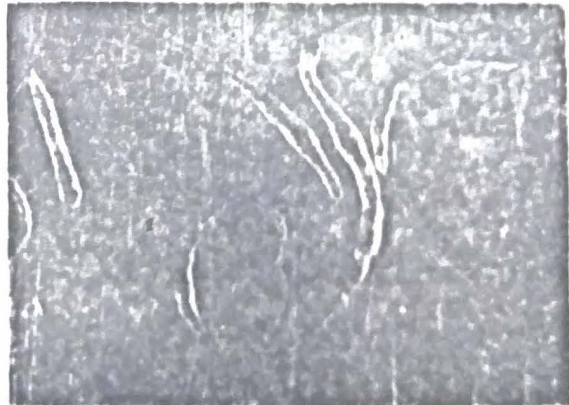
1



2



3



4

Fig. 1,2. Etched inscriptions by the author, 1966.

Fig. 3,4. Kinderhook plate no. 5 detail.

Northwestern Study of
Kinderhook Plate
November, 1980

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

EVANSTON, ILLINOIS 60701

THE TECHNOLOGICAL INSTITUTE
DEPARTMENT OF MATERIALS SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING

TELEPHONE: (312) 492-3537
(312) 492-3587

November 19, 1980

Dr. Stanley Kimball
352 So. 3rd East, Apt. 77
Salt Lake City, Utah 84111

Dear Stan:

Enclosed is the long awaited Kinderhook Plate report.
I hope it meets your needs. Let me know how I can be of further
assistance.

Best wishes.

Yours truly,



D. Lynn Johnson
Professor

DLJ:wmh
Encl.

Analysis of the Kinderhook Plate
Owned by the Chicago Historical Society

by

D. Lynn Johnson
November 1980

Introduction

The artifact known as the Kinderhook plate, which is currently in the possession of the Chicago Historical Society, was examined to determine whether it is of an ancient or modern (19th Century) origin. The composition and probable age of the alloy of which the artifact is made was to be determined. Also, the nature and method of forming of the characters on the plate was to be determined. Some new experimental techniques have been applied to complement the studies that have been heretofore accomplished.

Analytical Techniques

The Scanning Electron Microscope (SEM) was utilized to examine the grooves which form the characters on the plate. The extreme depth of focus at high magnification makes it possible to determine whether these grooves were cut or scratched with a tool, or whether they were etched with acid. Heretofore, there have been differing opinions by professional engravers on this question. The high resolution of the SEM can clearly distinguish between these two methods. A cut or scratched line would show flows of metal adjacent to the groove, particularly where two grooves intersected; there would be a flow of metal from the second groove into the first. Moreover, no tool could be perfectly smooth or sharp at the cutting edge, and serrations present would leave corresponding parallel grooves and ridges running lengthwise within the grooves. On the other hand, etched lines would show no metal flows, no internal grooves, and would, rather, present a roughened, pock-marked surface within the grooves. Under favorable circumstances, the grain boundaries of the metal would be preferentially attacked by the acid, thus revealing the pattern of the grain boundaries and the grain structure.

If the grooves were etched with nitric acid, it might be anticipated that nitrate residues would exist within the grooves and perhaps on the surface of the artifact. The scanning Auger microprobe (SAM)

was utilized to detect nitrogen compounds. In this technique, chemical analysis of the first one or two atom layers is accomplished, which makes it possible to detect minute quantities of material that could not be detected by conventional chemical analysis, including x-ray fluorescence.

While the sample was in the SEM, a preliminary x-ray fluorescence analysis was conducted. However, the size of the plate relative to the chamber size of the SEM made it impossible to achieve optimum conditions for chemical analysis. Consequently, permission was granted by the Chicago Historical Society to remove a small amount of material from an edge of the artifact for a more detailed and careful x-ray fluorescence analysis in the SEM. The composition was determined by energy dispersive analysis by x-ray fluorescence under the action of the electron beam of the SEM.

Permission was granted to polish an edge of the specimen for metallographic examination. Consequently, a portion of one edge was ground and polished and examined in reflected light by optical microscopy.

Results and Discussion

Figure 1 shows a portion of one of the characters as seen in the SEM. The strokes of the character show irregular borders, as seen in Fig. 1-b. There is also a non-metallic residue in the grooves which obscures the bottom of the grooves. It is also evident that the surface of the metal next to the grooves is undistorted.

2A
2B
Figure 2 shows another character which has much broader grooves. The higher magnification photograph, Fig. 2-b, clearly shows a granular appearance within the groove. The dark lines that form a network are grain boundaries between the individual grains of metal; these grain boundaries have been preferentially attacked by an acid. The surface of the plate near the grooves has not been attacked by acid.

The absence of metal flows, such as would be produced by cutting or scratching the lines, is evidenced in Fig. 2-a, where the intersections between grooves show no distortion.

There are some striations parallel to the grooves, evidenced in Fig. 2-b. However, these are superimposed upon the etched structure

and are more or less random, rather than of a systematic nature as would be true for a cut groove; they probably originated some time during cleaning of the plate.

To summarize, all of the evidence indicates that the characters on the plate were prepared by etching with acid. It would be impossible to form the structures seen in the SEM by any form of tooling or scratching or cutting. The evidence of etching could not have arisen after the characters were cut, otherwise the surface of the plate would be similarly etched, whereas Figures 1 and 2 show that the surface of the plate is not etched.

During the etching process, a solution of copper ions in the acid would be developed and deposits of the resulting salts could remain after the etching was completed. It is apparent from Fig. 1 and Fig. 3 that some sort of residue exists in some of the grooves. The scanning Auger microprobe was used to analyze these residues. A clear indication of nitrogen was detected, which would be consistent with a copper nitrate residue and could indicate that nitric acid was used in the etching. This would be the probable acid used, since dilute sulfuric or hydrochloric acids do not readily attack copper or copper-rich alloys.

A semi-quantitative chemical analysis was performed in the SEM using energy dispersive analysis of x-rays excited by the electron beam. The alloy contains approximately 73% copper, 24% zinc, lesser amounts of iron, aluminum, and silicon (on the order of 1% or less), and trace amounts of cadmium and lead and, perhaps, arsenic. There is, in addition to these metallic impurities, some sulfur, indicating that the metal was obtained from a sulfide ore.

The polished edge viewed in the light microscope revealed a basically "clean" alloy, i.e., it contained a minimum amount of inclusions of impurities. This is consistent with the chemical analysis discussed above.

It can be concluded from the chemical analysis and microscopic examinations that the plate is made from a modern brass alloy, not inconsistent with middle 19th Century technology. One would expect an ancient alloy to contain much more impurities and inclusions. Moreover, the manufacture of brass (copper plus zinc) is a relatively modern development, according to extant literature.

Conclusions

The plate owned by the Chicago Historical Society, and known as the Kinderhook Plate, is made from a brass alloy consistent with the technology of the middle 19th Century. The characters on the plate were formed by etching with acid, probably nitric acid.

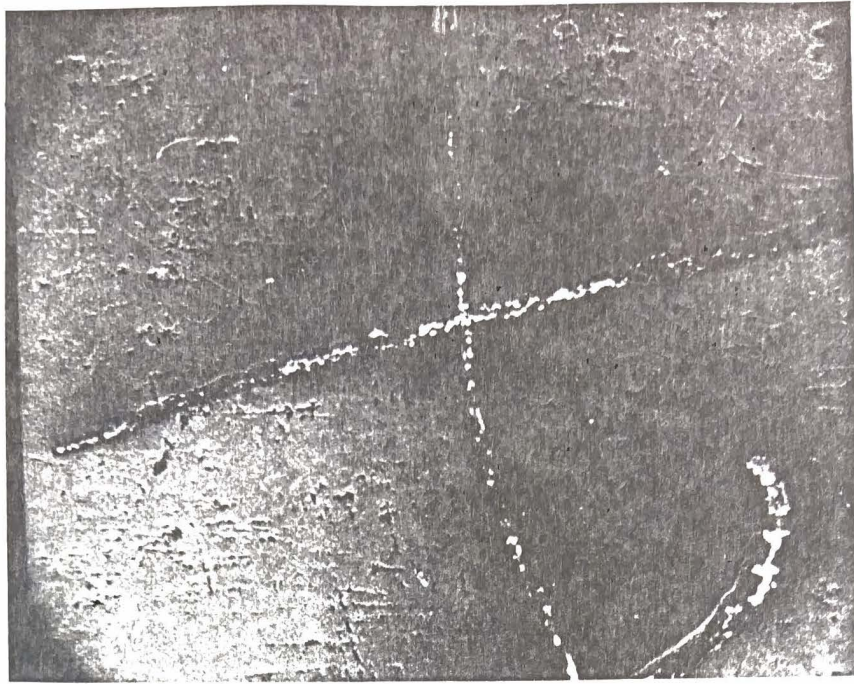


Figure 1a. SEM micrograph of a Kinderhook character, X22.

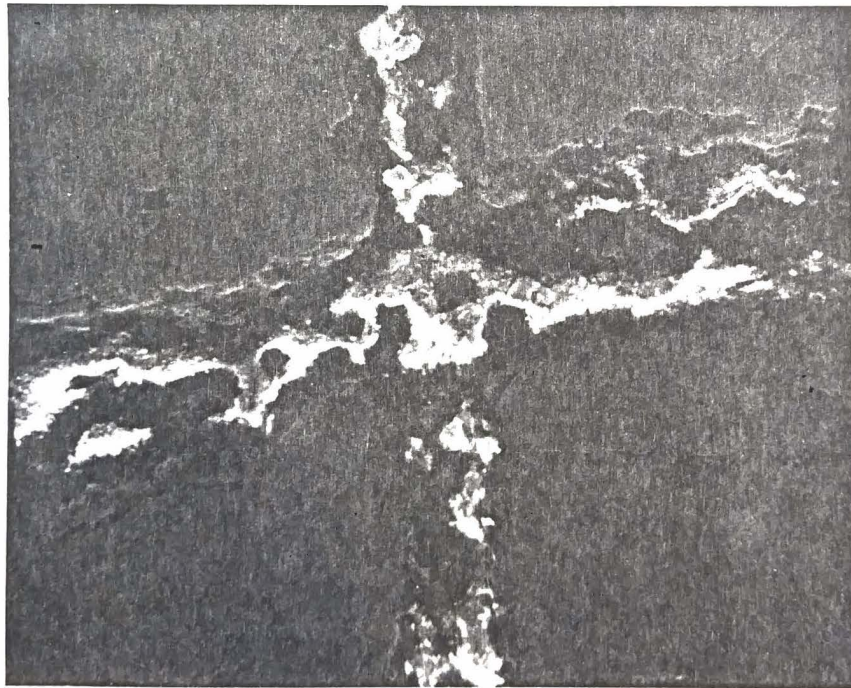


Figure 1b. SEM micrograph of a portion of the same character shown in Figure 1a, X220.

5.

*etched
impossible with a tool
the clean surface around it*

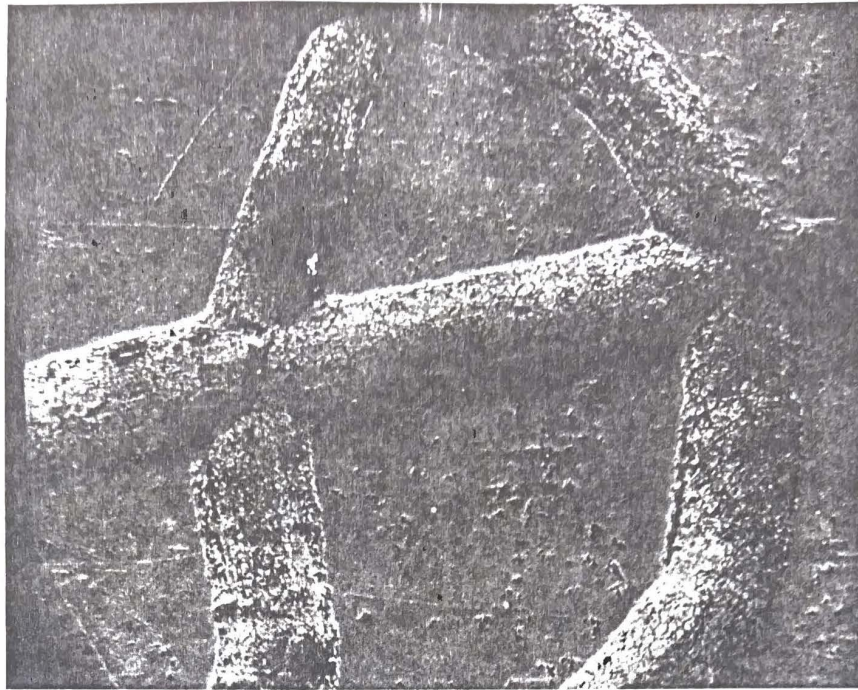


Figure 2a. SEM micrograph of a Kinderhook character, X22.

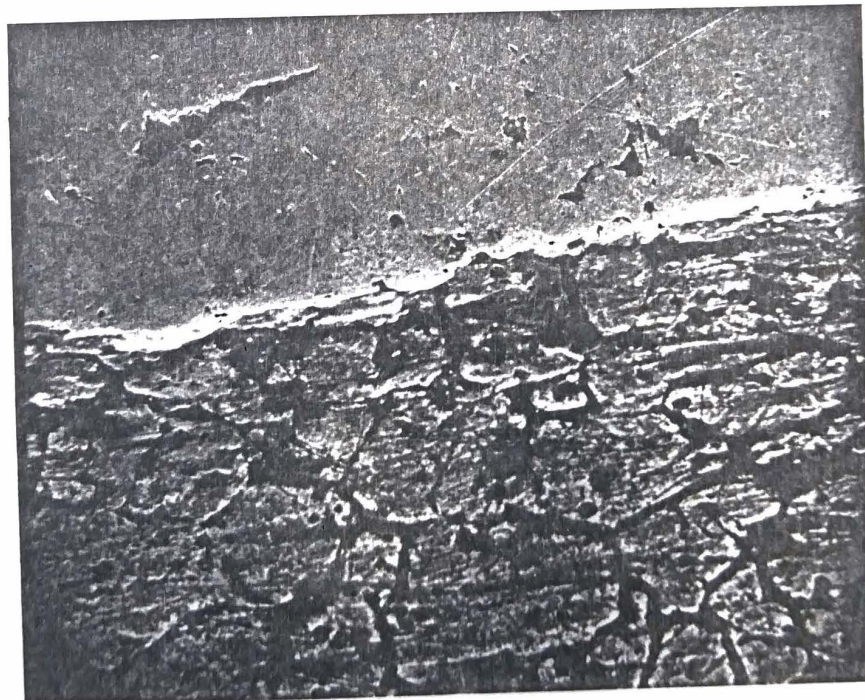


Figure 2b. SEM micrograph of a portion of the same character shown in Figure 2a, X220.

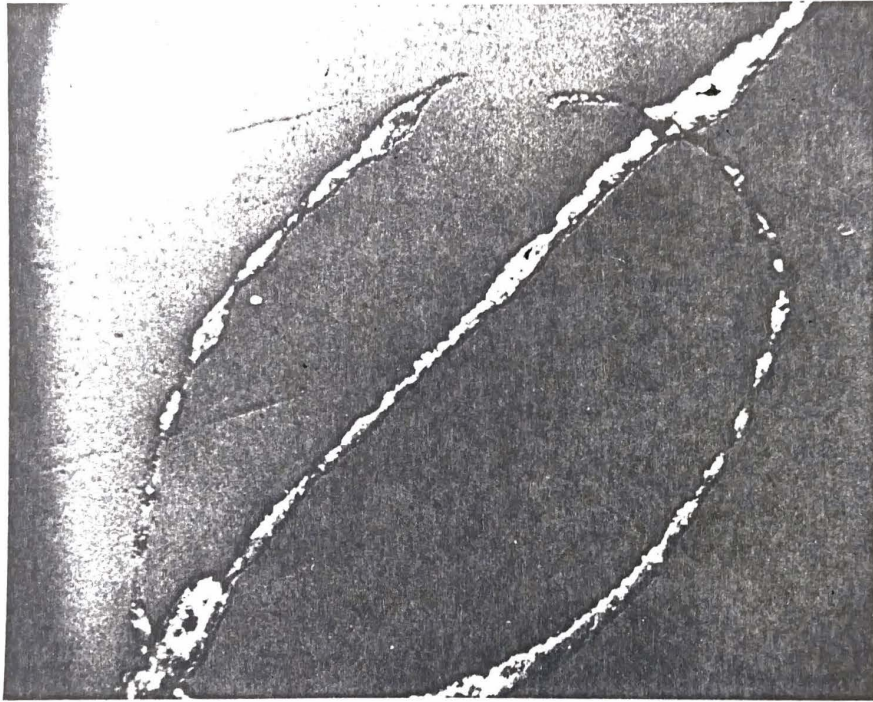


Figure 3. SEM micrograph of a Kinderhook character, X22.

Appendix

In the course of examining the Kinderhook Plate owned by the Chicago Historical Society, an interesting anomaly was discovered. One of the characters on the plate has an angular dent near one end, as can be seen in Fig. A-1. That this is a dent can be verified by noticing that a similar dent exists nearby to the right. A larger magnification of the dent on the right reveals a feature to the right which would have been produced by a nick in the edge of the instrument which produced the dent, as shown in Fig. A-2. This same feature shows up in the left-hand dent, partially obliterated by the intersection with the right-hand vertical stroke of the character, as seen in Fig. A-3. The left-hand of these two dents has been interpreted in the published facsimiles of the Kinderhook Plate as a part of the character. The significance of this is that the facsimile must therefore have been made from this plate, rather than this plate being a copy based upon the facsimile. If the present plate were a copy from the facsimile, this stroke would have been etched in with the other strokes, rather than being added as a dent.



Figure A.1. Light micrograph of Kinderhook plate characters, X7.6.

A.2.

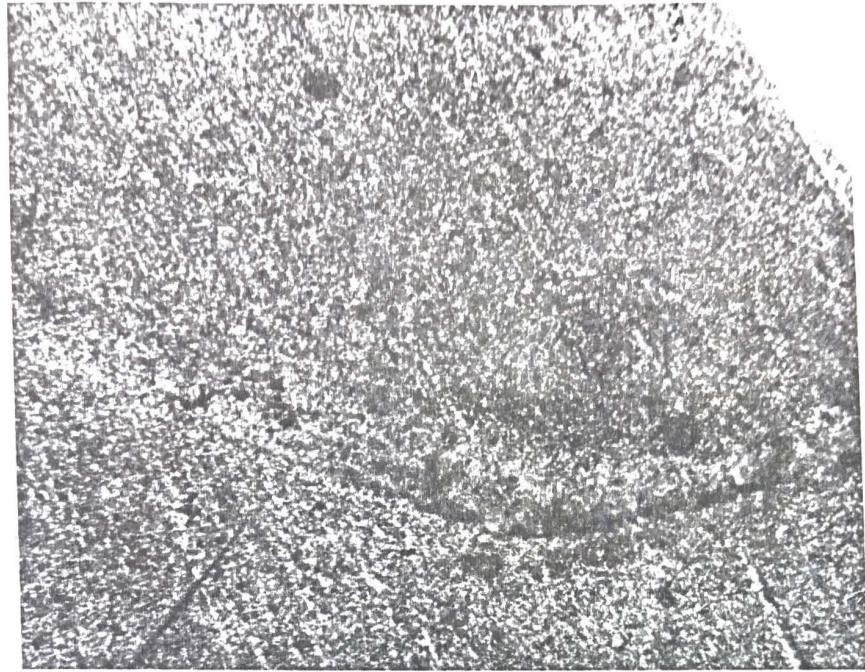


Figure A.2. Light micrograph of right-hand dent of Figure A.1,
x50.

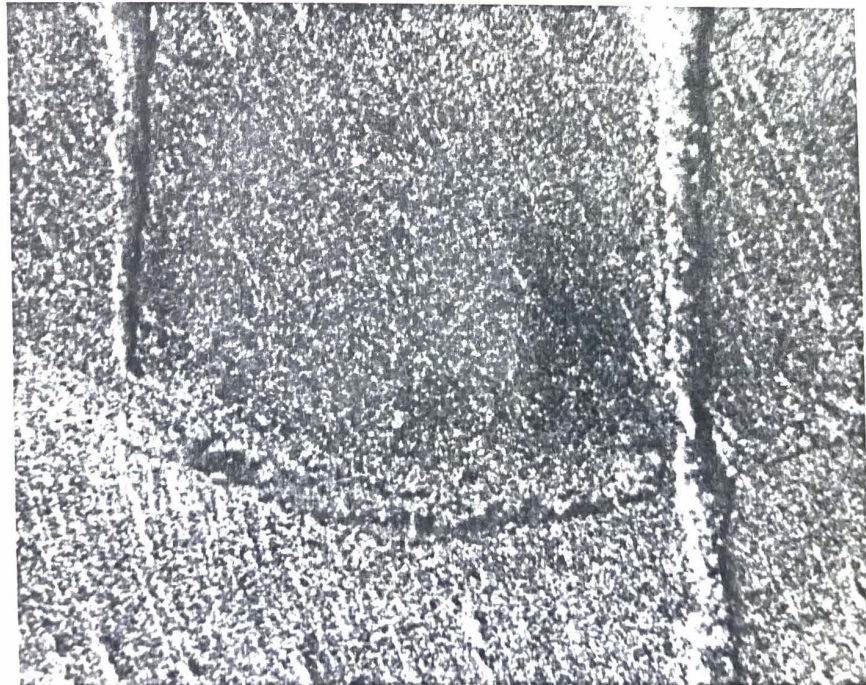


Figure A.3. Light micrograph of left-hand dent of Figure A.1,
x50.

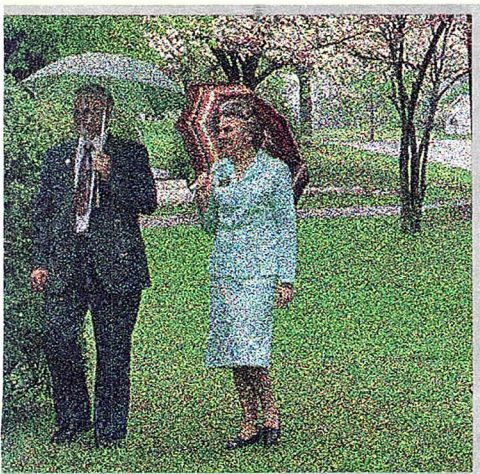
Ensign article
acknowledging the fraudulent
nature of the Kinderhook plates

August, 1981

AUGUST 1981

MISSIONARY
COUPLES
EMPHASIS—
SEE “WE HOPE
THEY CALL US
ON A
MISSION!”

PAGE 6



ENSIGN

THE ENSIGN OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

50 East North Temple
Salt Lake City, Utah 84150
August 1981
Volume 11 Number 8

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On the cover: Photography by Elder Kirk Buttle, David Sharples, Cleve Friedman, and Elder Stanley P. Moyle. See page 6 for more on missionary couples.

Inside front cover: *Miracle of the Gulls*, by Minerva Teichert, 40" by 46", oil on canvas. Located in the Church Historical Department.

Inside back cover: *West Face of Mt. Timpanogas*, by Al Rounds, 19" by 28", watercolor. Located in the Church Historical Department.

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Kinderhook Plates Brought to Joseph Smith Appear to Be a Nineteenth-Century Hoax

By Stanley B. Kimball



Enlargement of the front (left) and back of the Kinderhook plate now owned by the Chicago Historical Society. Actual size of the bell-shaped plate is 2 $\frac{7}{8}$ " high by 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ " wide at the bottom, tapering to 1 $\frac{3}{16}$ " at the top; average thickness is 1/32". The nickel-size splotch on the backside is likely due to corrosion since its 1843 "discovery." Photographs courtesy Chicago Historical Society.

A recent electronic and chemical analysis of a metal plate (one of six original plates) brought in 1843 to the Prophet Joseph Smith in Nauvoo, Illinois, appears to solve a previously unanswered question in Church history, helping to further evidence that the plate is what its producers later said it was—a nineteenth-century attempt to lure Joseph Smith into making a translation of ancient-looking characters that had been

etched into the plates.

Joseph Smith did not make the hoped-for translation. In fact, no evidence exists that he manifested any further interest in the plates after early examination of them, although some members of the Church hoped that they would prove to be significant. But the plates never did.

The complex yet fascinating story behind this little-known event in Church history follows:

Historical Background

In Nauvoo, Illinois, during the first week in May 1843, the Church publication *Times and Seasons* printed an article entitled "Ancient Records" which reported the alleged discovery of six ancient brass plates in an Indian mound near the town of Kinderhook, fifty-five miles south of Nauvoo in Pike County, Illinois.¹

A statement signed by W. P.

Harris, M.D., of Barry, Pike County, informed the *Times and Seasons* readers of the discovery:

"On the 16th of April last a respectable merchant by the name of Robert Wiley, commenced digging in a large mound near this place: he excavated to the depth of 10 feet and came to rock; about that time the rain began to fall, and he abandoned the work. On the 23d he and quite a number of the citizens with myself, repaired to the mound, and after making ample opening, we found plenty of rock, the most of which appeared as though it had been strongly burned; and after removing full two feet of said rock, we found plenty of charcoal and ashes; also human bones that appeared as though they had been burned; and near the eciphalon [correctly spelled "encephalon," or head] a bundle was found that consisted of six plates of brass, of a bell shape, each having a hole near the small end, and a ring through them all, and clasped with two clasps, the ring and clasps appeared to be of iron very much oxidated, the plates appeared first to be copper, and had the appearance of being covered with characters. It was agreed by the company that I should cleanse the plates: accordingly I took them to my house, washed them with soap and water, and a woolen cloth; but finding them not yet cleansed I treated them with dilute sulphuric acid which made them perfectly clean, on which it appeared that they were completely covered with hieroglyphics that none as yet have been able to read."

The plates greatly excited public curiosity in the area, and within a week of their alleged discovery they were brought to Nauvoo for a short stay. An editorial comment in the same *Times and Seasons* article indicates how important the eager writer felt these brass plates might be:

"Circumstances are daily

transpiring which give additional testimony to the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. . . . The following . . . will, perhaps have a tendency to convince the sceptical, that such things [metal plates] have been used, and that even the obnoxious Book of Mormon, may be true."

The editorial further reported: "Mr. Smith has had those plates, what his opinion concerning them is, we have not yet ascertained. The gentleman that owns them has taken them away, or we should have given a fac simile of the plates and characters in this number. We are informed however, that he purposes returning with them for translation; if so, we may be able yet to furnish our readers with it."

A month and a half later the *Nauvoo Neighbor* press published a 12" x 15" broadside entitled *Discovery of the Brass Plates*.² (See p. 72.) This handbill contained a reprint of the *Times and Seasons* story, with the addition of facsimiles of all twelve sides of the six plates. Nothing further regarding the Prophet's opinion of the plates appeared on the broadside—only a statement that "the contents of the plates . . . will be published in the 'Times and Seasons,' as soon as the translation is completed."

These two oblique references to a "translation" were followed thirteen years later by a more direct published statement that until recently was wrongly thought to have been written by Joseph Smith himself. On September 3 and 10, 1856, the following paragraphs appeared in the *Deseret News* as part of the serialized "History of Joseph Smith":

"[May 1, 1843:] I insert fac similes of the six brass plates found near Kinderhook, in Pike county, Illinois, on April 23, by Mr. R. Wiley and others, while excavating a large mound. They found a skeleton about six feet from the surface of the earth, which must have stood nine feet

high. The plates were found on the breast of the skeleton, and were covered on both sides with ancient characters.

"I have translated a portion of them, and find they contain the history of the person with whom they were found. He was a descendant of Ham, through the loins of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and that he received his kingdom from the ruler of heaven and earth." (Then followed a reprint of material from the *Times and Seasons* article.)

Although this account appears to be the writing of Joseph Smith, it is actually an excerpt from a journal of William Clayton. It has been well known that the serialized "History of Joseph Smith" consists largely of items from other persons' personal journals and other sources, collected during Joseph Smith's lifetime and continued after the Saints were in Utah, then edited and pieced together to form a history of the Prophet's life "in his own words." It was not uncommon in the nineteenth century for biographers to put the narrative in the first person when compiling a biographical work, even though the subject of the biography did not actually say or write all the words attributed to him; thus the narrative would represent a faithful report of what *others* felt would be helpful to print. The Clayton journal excerpt was one item used in this way. For example, the words "I have translated a portion" originally read "President J. has translated a portion. . . ."³

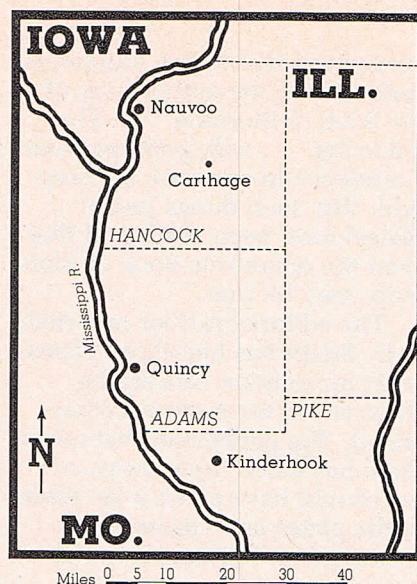
Where the ideas written by William Clayton originated is unknown. However, as will be pointed out later, speculation about the plates and their possible content was apparently quite unrestrained in Nauvoo when the plates first appeared. In any case, this altered version of the extract from William Clayton's journal was reprinted in the *Millennial Star* of 15 January 1859,

and, unfortunately, was finally carried over into official Church history when the "History of Joseph Smith" was edited into book form as the *History of the Church* in 1909.⁴

By 1912, however, at least two items of evidence had come to light indicating that the Kinderhook plates were not authentic. One was a letter written in 1855 (but not published until 1912) by Dr. W. P. Harris—the same W. P. Harris who authored the statement that appeared in the *Times and Seasons* article. In this letter he wrote that in 1843 he had accepted the discovery of the plates as genuine. "I washed and cleaned the plates and subsequently made an honest affidavit to the same," he said. "But since that time, Bridge Whitton [a blacksmith in Kinderhook, Illinois] said to me that he cut and prepared the plates and he (B. Whitton) and R. Wiley engraved them themselves, and that there was nitric acid put upon them the night before they were found to rust the iron ring and band. And that they were carried to the mound, rubbed in the dirt and carefully dropped into the pit where they were found."⁵

The other item was a letter written in 1879 by Wilbur Fugate (another of those present at the excavation of the plates) to an anti-Mormon in Salt Lake City.⁶ Fugate declared that the alleged discovery of the Kinderhook plates was "a HUMBUG, gotten up by Robert Wiley, Bridge Whitton and myself. . . . None of the nine persons who signed the certificate [a document included in the *Times and Seasons* article] knew the secret, except Wiley and I.

"We read in Pratt's prophecy that 'Truth is yet to spring out of the earth.' [The quote is from Parley P. Pratt's 1837 missionary tract *Voice of Warning*.] We concluded to prove the prophecy by way of a joke. We soon made our plans and executed them. Bridge Whitton cut them out of some



pieces of copper; Wiley and I made the hieroglyphics by making impressions on beeswax and filling them with acid and putting it on the plates. When they were finished we put them together with rust made of nitric acid, old iron and lead, and bound them with a piece of hoop iron, covering them completely with the rust."

Fugate then went on to tell how they secretly buried the plates and faked their discovery.

These accounts have generated much controversy for more than a hundred years since the martyrdom of Joseph Smith, the question being twofold: (1) *are the Kinderhook plates authentic?* and (2) *did Joseph Smith attempt to translate them?* In general, Latter-day Saint scholars and laymen have sought to confirm the story of the Kinderhook plates, feeling that such authentication would both defend the Prophet and make more plausible the account of the Book of Mormon having been taken from plates of gold. Antagonists, on the other hand, have sought to demonstrate that Joseph Smith was a false prophet.

The Question of Authenticity

Because the whereabouts of the plates since at least 1844 had been unknown, their authenticity

remained a matter of conjecture. But in 1920, one of them came into the possession of the Chicago Historical Society. Only then did direct testing become possible.

How the one remaining plate got to Chicago is an interesting story in itself—a story that is consistent with physical evidence (to be discussed later) that this plate is indeed one of the original Kinderhook plates brought to Nauvoo in 1843.

In 1845, a Dr. Joseph Nash McDowell established a college of medicine in St. Louis. The college had a museum of natural history that contained 3,000 items, among them "Antiquities, &c. of our country." W. P. Harris, in his letter of 1855, said he had heard from a fellow physician "that R Wiley graduated [from the college] since finding the plates . . . and that Dr. Professor McDowell on surgery has the plates now in his office." It is now apparent that Wiley either sold or gave the Kinderhook plates to McDowell for the museum.

McDowell was a southern sympathizer who left St. Louis to serve the Confederacy as a physician during the Civil War. This made him very unpopular in St. Louis, and when the U.S. Army seized his college in 1861 for use as a prison, the 2nd Iowa Reserve Regiment sacked it.⁷

The Chicago Historical Society received one of the plates in 1920 as a gift from Charles F. Gunther, a noted collector of historical artifacts. Gunther had acquired it on 15 July 1889 from F. C. A. Richardson, M.D. (a member of both the St. Louis and the Chicago Academies of Science). Richardson in turn received it from a Dr. J. W. McDowell (not the same man as Dr. Joseph Nash McDowell), who got it from a soldier in the 2nd Iowa Reserve Regiment.

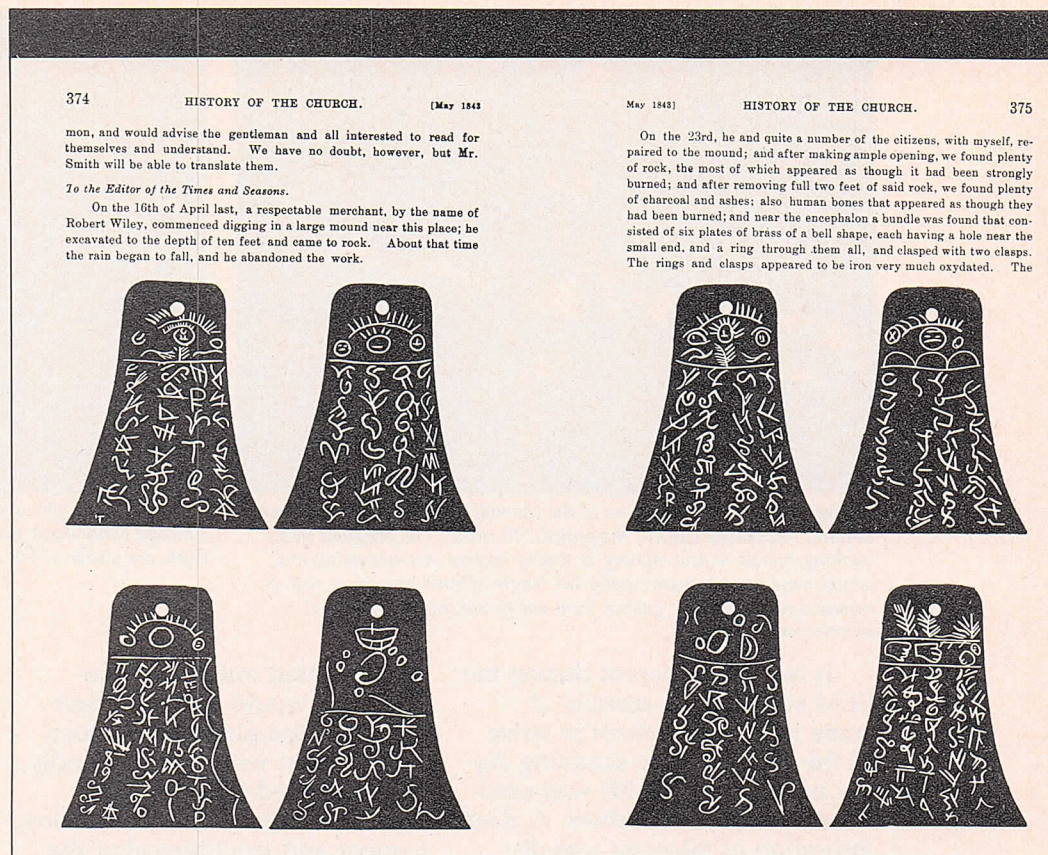
Since coming to public awareness in 1920, this plate has

undergone a number of tests. For example, in 1953 it was examined by two engravers who made an affidavit stating that "to the best of our knowledge this Plate was engraved with a pointed instrument and not etched with acid"—a conclusion which contradicted the letters claiming the plates to be a hoax, and which therefore fueled the hopes of those who wanted the plates to be proven genuine.⁸

A much more rigorous study of the Chicago plate was organized in 1969 by Dr. Paul Cheesman of Brigham Young University. He secured permission from the Chicago Historical Society to bring the plate to BYU for exhaustive non-destructive testing—that is, analytical tests not involving actual damage to the plate. The results of these tests were to be compared with previous tests performed in 1960 and 1966. The plate was examined by physicists, engravers, a jeweler, a metalworker, and several photographers, with mixed results. The physicists concluded that the plate was acid-etched and of non-ancient brass; the others could not agree whether it was etched, engraved, or both. Dr. Cheesman concluded: "It appears we need to have a destructive analysis for further confirmation. Much more testing needs to be done."⁹

There the matter rested until 1980, when I had the good fortune to secure permission from the Chicago Historical Society for the recommended destructive tests. These tests, involving some very sophisticated analytical techniques, were performed by Professor D. Lynn Johnson of the Department of Materials Science and Engineering at Northwestern University.

Dr. Johnson used a scanning electron microscope (SEM) to examine the grooves that form the characters on the plate to determine whether they were cut or scratched with a tool or whether



Front and back of four of the six Kinderhook plates are shown in these facsimiles (rough copies of even earlier published facsimiles), which appeared in 1909 in *History of the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 374-75.

they were etched with acid. A scanning Auger microprobe (SAM) was used to detect any nitrogen residues that might have been left in the grooves as a result of etching with nitric acid. To determine the composition of the metal, an X-ray fluorescence analysis was done on a small amount of material removed from the plate (a destructive test). And finally, an edge of the plate was ground and polished so that the metal could be examined by microscope for impurities and inclusions (also a destructive test).

The extreme depth of focus and resolution of the scanning electron microscope (SEM) at high magnification make it possible to clearly distinguish between etching or engraving on metal surfaces. If a character were cut or scratched into the surface, the groove would contain secondary grooves and ridges running

lengthwise within it where the engraving instrument forced a flow of metal. This would be especially noticeable at groove intersections, where metal would be pushed from the second groove into the first. On the other hand, etched lines would show no metal flows or secondary grooves; instead, a roughened, pock-marked etching would be seen.

Figure 1 shows part of one of the characters as seen in the SEM. The irregular, grainy texture characteristic of acid etching is evident, not a striated surface that would have been produced by an engraving tool. A thorough SEM examination of the characters on the plate brought Dr. Johnson to the conclusion that the characters on the plate were indeed prepared by acid etching, not by any form of tooling, scratching, or cutting.

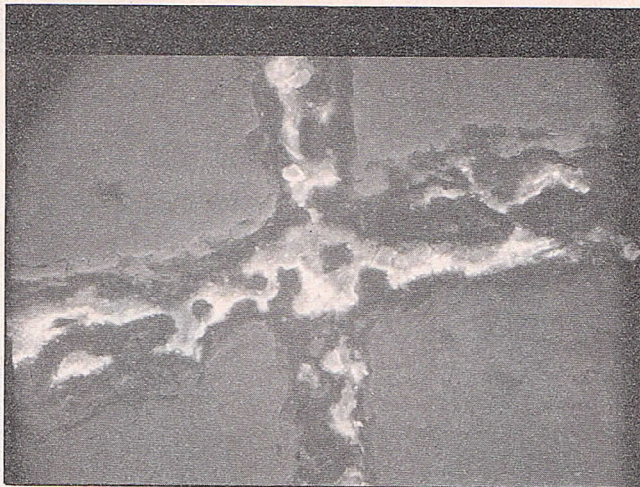


Figure 1. A portion of one of the characters as seen in the scanning electron microscope (SEM), magnified 220 times. The irregular pock-marking typical of acid etching is clearly evident. An engraving tool would have scratch marks along the length of each groove, as well as evidence of metal being pushed from one groove into the other at intersections.



Figure 2. Light micrograph of characters on the backside of the Chicago Kinderhook plate, columns 3 and 4 (magnification 7.6). Identical dents are visible at left center and right edge.

It became apparent during the SEM study that a residue of some kind was present in some of the grooves. The scanning Auger microprobe (SAM) was used to analyze these residues. A clear indication of nitrogen was detected, which would be consistent with a copper nitrate residue and could indicate that nitric acid was used in the etching, as those who reportedly originated the deception had claimed.

The X-ray fluorescence test indicated that the plate was made of a true brass alloy of approximately 73 percent copper, 24 percent zinc, and lesser amounts of other metals. In addition, an examination of the small area of the plate that was ground and polished revealed a basically "clean" alloy—that is, there were very few visible traces of impurities such as particles of slag and other debris that one might expect to find in metal of ancient manufacture.

As a result of these tests, we concluded that the plate owned by the Chicago Historical Society is *not* of ancient origin. We concluded that the plate was etched with acid; and as Paul Cheesman and other scholars

have pointed out, ancient inhabitants would probably have engraved the plates rather than etched them with acid. Secondly, we concluded that the plate was made from a true brass alloy (copper and zinc) typical of the mid-nineteenth century; whereas the "brass" of ancient times was actually bronze, an alloy of copper and tin. Furthermore, one would expect an ancient alloy to contain larger amounts of impurities and inclusions than did the alloy tested.

Dr. Johnson and I did, however, take into account the possibility that the Chicago plate was only a copy of the original. In reference to this, he reported:

"In the course of examining the plate, an interesting anomaly was discovered. One of the characters on the plate (side B, column 3) has an angular dent near one end. [See Figure 2.] That this is a dent can be verified by noticing that a similar dent exists nearby, close to the edge of the plate. A larger magnification of the latter dent reveals a feature toward the right which would have been produced by a nick in the edge of the instrument that produced the dent. [See Figure 3.] This same nick shows up in the

left-hand dent, partially obliterated by the intersection of the dent with one of the vertical strokes of the character. [See Figure 4.] This dent was interpreted in the 1843 published facsimiles of the Kinderhook plate as part of the character. [See illustration, p. 72.] The significance of this is that the facsimile must therefore have been made from this plate, rather than this plate being a copy based on the facsimile. If the present plate were a copy from the facsimile, this stroke would have been etched in with the other strokes, rather than being added as a dent."

The conclusion, therefore, is that the Chicago plate is indeed one of the original Kinderhook plates, which now fairly well evidences them to be faked antiquities.¹⁰

The Question of Translation

But what does the above conclusion mean in relationship to the earlier references to a "translation" of the Kinderhook plates by Joseph Smith? Did he actually attempt to translate any of the plates?

To answer that question, it is necessary to look at the events of



Figure 3. Light micrograph of the right-hand dent of Figure 2 (magnification 50). A nick is visible at the far right on the dent.

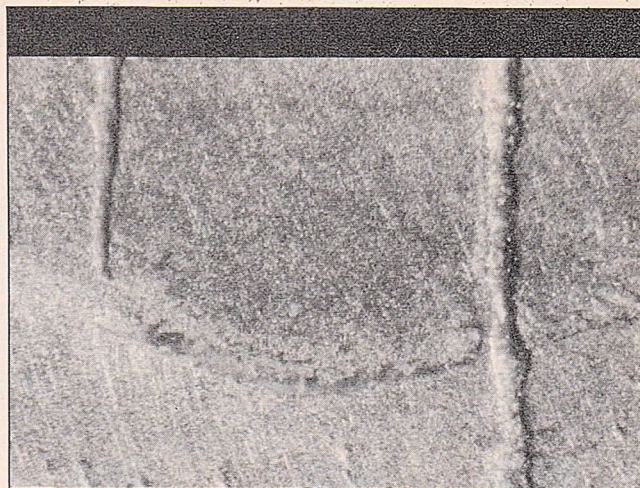


Figure 4. Light micrograph of the left-hand dent of Figure 2 (magnification 50). The nick is visible just next to the dent's intersection with the right-hand vertical stroke. As the article shows, the dent helps prove that this plate is the actual plate seen by the Nauvoo Saints.

April and May 1843 in sequence:

The plates were "discovered" on Sunday, 23 April 1843, and taken home by Dr. Harris for cleaning. Then, according to a story in the *Quincy Whig*, they were exhibited in Quincy during the following week.¹¹

There is some question about who brought the plates to Nauvoo. The Quincy, Illinois, certificate printed in the *Times and Seasons* article said, "The above described plates we have handed to Mr. Sharp [a Latter-day Saint present at the excavation] for the purpose of taking them to Nauvoo." However, Wilbur Fugate wrote in his 1879 letter: "The Mormons wanted to take the plates to Joe Smith, but we refused to let them go. Some time afterward a man assuming the name of Savage, of Quincy, borrowed the plates of Wiley to show to his literary friends there, and took them to Joe Smith. The same identical plates were returned to Wiley."

Charlotte Haven, a somewhat antagonistic non-Mormon who was visiting her sister (a Mormon) in Nauvoo at the time, wrote a letter on May 2 that gives the following account:

"We hear very frequently

from our Quincy friends through Mr. Joshua Moore, who passes through that place and this in his monthly zigzag tours through the State, traveling horseback. His last call on us was last Saturday [April 29] and he brought with him half a dozen thin pieces of brass, apparently very old, in the form of a bell about five or six inches long. They had on them scratches that looked like writing, and strange figures like symbolic characters. They were recently found, he said, in a mound a few miles below Quincy. When he showed them to Joseph, the latter said that the figures or writing on them was similar to that in which the Book of Mormon was written, and if Mr. Moore could leave them, he thought that by the help of revelation he would be able to translate them."¹²

It is possible, then, that Mr. Joshua Moore was the one who obtained the plates by pretense and brought them to Nauvoo. In any event, the plates had apparently arrived in Nauvoo by Saturday, April 29, and had been shown to Joseph Smith.

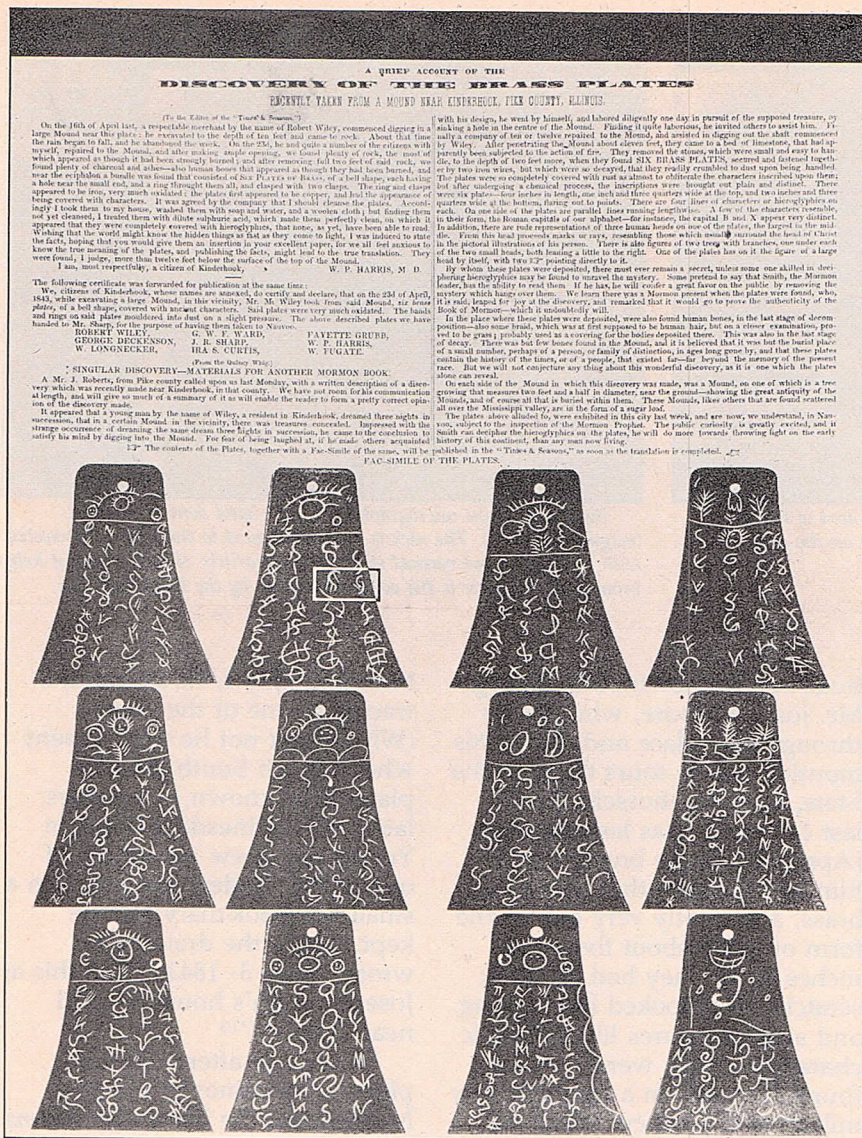
William Clayton evidently had access to the plates at some point, for in his journal entry of

Monday, May 1, he included a tracing of one of the plates.

(Whether or not he was present when Joseph Smith saw the plates is unknown.) Two days later, on Wednesday, Brigham Young also drew an outline of one of the Kinderhook plates in a small notebook/diary that he kept. Inside the drawing he wrote: "May 3- 1843. I had this at Joseph Smith's house. Found near Quincy."¹³

Very soon afterward the plates were removed from Nauvoo, for the *Times and Seasons* editorial, which was written perhaps on Wednesday or Thursday (May 3 or 4), said: "Mr. Smith has had those plates, what his opinion concerning them is, we have not yet ascertained. The gentleman that owns them has taken them away, or we should have given a fac simile of the plates and characters in this number. We are informed however, that he purposes returning with them for translation; if so, we may be able yet to furnish our readers with it."

The plates were apparently in Nauvoo, then, from Saturday the 29th through Wednesday the 3rd—a period of five days—and were then taken away. Later,



The first facsimiles of the Kinderhook plates appeared in this broadside published 24 June 1843 by the Nauvoo Neighbor. The box indicates the characters on the existing plate shown in Figures 2, 3, and 4 (see pages 70 and 71). The horizontal stroke at the bottom of the left-hand character is actually a dent in the original plate that was interpreted as part of the character by the person who made the facsimile.

however, they were evidently returned to Nauvoo for a time, for by June 24 the *Nauvoo Neighbor* press had access to them and was thus able to produce facsimiles for the published broadside. A *History of the Church* entry for Sunday, May 7, says: "In the forenoon I [Joseph Smith] was visited by several gentlemen, concerning the plates that were dug out near Kinderhook."¹⁴ Whether or not the plates were

actually returned on that day—or indeed, whether Joseph Smith himself ever had the plates again—is uncertain.

In any case, the translation for which hope had been expressed in the *Times and Seasons* did not appear. In a letter dated April 8, 1878, Wilbur Fugate recalled: "We understood Jo Smith said [the plates] would make a book of 1200 pages but he would not agree to translate them until they

were sent to the Antiquarian society at Philadelphia, France, and England." Furthermore, a review of other entries in Joseph Smith's history indicate that he was occupied during the following weeks with mayoral duties, Church business, the Nauvoo Legion, and four different trips to neighboring cities; there is no indication of translating activities.¹⁵ Then on June 23, just one day before publication of the broadside that repeated the Saints' hopeful expectation of an eventual translation, the Prophet was abducted by Missourians who tried to get him to Missouri for prosecution on charges of "treason." He made it back to Nauvoo on June 30, but the *habeas corpus* proceedings took up more than two weeks of his time.

Just when the plates were taken from Nauvoo for the second and perhaps final time is uncertain. But we know that by fall of that same year they were back in Robert Wiley's possession, for on November 15 he wrote a letter to one J. J. Harding suggesting that he was interested in selling the plates to "the National Institute," and that he was also interested in the "opinions of your different Antiquarian friends." In reference to having the plates examined by "the Antiquarian society at Philadelphia, France, and England," Wilbur Fugate went on to say: "They were sent and the answer was that there were no such Hyeroglyphics known, and if there ever had been, they had long since passed away. Then Smith began his translation." (The reference to Joseph Smith having begun a "translation" of the plates is in error, since they were never returned to Nauvoo. The Prophet died a martyr the following year.)

However, the question of when the plates were taken from Nauvoo is not as important as the fact that they were taken away. In spite of the considerable excitement they generated in

A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE DISCOVERY OF THE BEAAS PLATES RECENTLY TAKEN FROM A MOUND NEAR KINDERHOOK, TIER COUNTY, ILLINOIS.

On the 16th of April last, a respectable merchant by the name of Robert Wiley, commenced digging in a large mound near this place; he excavated to the depth of ten feet and came to rock. About that time the rain began to fall, and he abandoned the work. On the 23d of May, he again commenced digging, and on the 24th of the same month, he discovered a large number of plates, which he found in a hole in the rock, and he immediately reported to the Mayor, and after making a simple opening, we found a large number of plates, the most of which appeared as though it had been directly buried, and after removing had two feet of soil, we found the plates, which were covered with a thin layer of soil, and a hole near the small end, and a ring through them all, and closed with two clamps. The ring and clamps being covered with characters. It was agreed by the company that I should cleanse the plates. Accordingly I took them to my house, washed them with soap and water, and a wooden cloth, but finding them not yet cleaned, I treated them with dilute sulphuric acid, which made them perfectly clean, on which I appeared that they were completely covered with hieroglyphics, that none, as yet, have been able to read. What, then, the world might know the hidden things as fast as they come to light, I was induced to state the facts, hoping that you would give them an insertion in your excellent paper, for we all feel anxious to know the true meaning of the plates, and to publish the facts, might lead to the true translation. They were found, I judge, more than twelve feet below the surface of the top of the mound.

I am, most respectfully, Sir,
W. P. HARRIS, M. D.

The following certificate was forwarded for publication at the same time:
We, citizens of Kinderhook, whose names are annexed, do certify and declare that on the 23d of April, 1843, while excavating a large mound, in the vicinity of Mr. M. Wiley's farm, and mound, six brass plates, of a bell shape, covered with ancient characters. Said plates were very much oxidized. The hands and rings on said plates pointed out in a slight groove. The above described plates we have handed to Mr. Sharp for the purpose of having them taken to Nauvoo.

With his design, he went by himself, and labored diligently one day in pursuit of the supposed treasure, by making a hole in the center of the mound. Finding it quite laborious, he asked others to assist him. Finally a company of ten or twelve repaired to the mound, and assisted in digging out the shaft, commenced by Wiley. After penetrating the mound about eleven feet, they came to a bed of limestone, that had apparently been subjected to the action of fire. They removed the stones, which were small and easy to handle, to the depth of ten feet more, when they found SIX BRASS PLATES, several and indeed infinitely more by two iron wires, but which were so decayed, that they readily crumbled to dust upon being handled. The plates were so completely covered with rust as almost to obliterate the characters inscribed upon them; but after undergoing a chemical process, the inscriptions were brought out plain and distinct. There were six plates—four inches in length, one inch and three quarters wide at the top, and two inches and three quarters wide at the bottom, during out to pounds. There are four lines of characters or hieroglyphics on each. On one side of the plates are parallel lines running lengthwise. A few of the characters resemble in their form, the Roman capitals of our alphabet—the letters, the capital B and X appear very distinct. In addition, there are rude representations of three human heads on one of the plates, the largest in the middle. From this local proceeds marks or rays, resembling those which surround the head of Christ in the pictorial illustrations of his person. There are also figures of two trees with branches, one under each of the two small heads, both bearing a little to the right. One of the plates lies on it the figure of a large head by itself, with two 22° pointing directly to it.

ROBERT WILEY,
GEORGE DICKINSON,
W. LONGNECKER,
C. W. T. WARD,
J. R. SHARP,
IRA S. CURTIS,
PAVETTE GRUBB,
W. P. HARRIS,
W. FUGATE.

By whom these plates were deposited, there must ever remain a secret, unless some one skilled in deciphering hieroglyphics may be found to unravel the mystery. Some pretend to say that Smith, the Mormon leader, has the ability to read them. If he has, he will render a great favor to the public, by revealing the mystery which hangs over them. We learn there was a Mormon present when the plates were found, who, if it had, longed for joy at the discovery, and remarked that it would go to prove the authenticity of the Book of Mormon—which is undoubtedly well.

*SINGULAR DISCOVERY—MATERIALS FOR ANOTHER MORMON BOOK.

On each side of the mound in which this discovery was made, was a mound, on one of which is a tree growing that measured two feet and a half in diameter, near the ground—showing the great antiquity of the mound, and of course all that is buried within them. These mounds, like others that are found scattered all over the Mississippi valley, are in the form of a sugar loaf.

It appeared that a young man by the name of Wiley, a resident in Kinderhook, dreamed three nights in succession, that in a certain mound in the vicinity, there was treasure concealed. Impressed with the strange occurrence of dreaming the same dream three nights in succession, he came to the conclusion to satisfy his mind by digging into the mound. For fear of being laughed at, if he made others acquainted

with his design, he went by himself, and labored diligently one day in pursuit of the supposed treasure, by making a hole in the center of the mound. Finding it quite laborious, he asked others to assist him. Finally a company of ten or twelve repaired to the mound, and assisted in digging out the shaft, commenced by Wiley. After penetrating the mound about eleven feet, they came to a bed of limestone, that had apparently been subjected to the action of fire. They removed the stones, which were small and easy to handle, to the depth of ten feet more, when they found SIX BRASS PLATES, several and indeed infinitely more by two iron wires, but which were so decayed, that they readily crumbled to dust upon being handled. The plates were so completely covered with rust as almost to obliterate the characters inscribed upon them; but after undergoing a chemical process, the inscriptions were brought out plain and distinct. There were six plates—four inches in length, one inch and three quarters wide at the top, and two inches and three quarters wide at the bottom, during out to pounds. There are four lines of characters or hieroglyphics on each. On one side of the plates are parallel lines running lengthwise. A few of the characters resemble in their form, the Roman capitals of our alphabet—the letters, the capital B and X appear very distinct. In addition, there are rude representations of three human heads on one of the plates, the largest in the middle. From this local proceeds marks or rays, resembling those which surround the head of Christ in the pictorial illustrations of his person. There are also figures of two trees with branches, one under each of the two small heads, both bearing a little to the right. One of the plates lies on it the figure of a large head by itself, with two 22° pointing directly to it.

17° The contents of the Plates, together with a Fac-Simile of the same, will be published in the "Times & Seasons," as soon as the translation is completed.

FAC-SIMILE OF THE PLATES.

Nauvoo after their "discovery," the plates were allowed to leave the Saints, apparently without fanfare. No known record exists which intimates that Joseph Smith or those around him ever purchased or attempted to purchase the plates (as were the mummies associated with the Book of Abraham papyrus), even though their owner, Wiley, was prepared to sell them.

That the plates had aroused interest in Nauvoo is evident from two accounts that were not published until years later. In a letter written to a friend on Sunday, May 7, Parley P. Pratt said: "A large number of Citizens have seen them and compared the characters with those on the Egyptian papyrus which is now in this city." A few lines previously, he had begun his comment on the plates as follows:

"Six plates having the appearance of Brass have lately been dug out of a mound by a gentleman in Pike Co. Illinois. They are small and filled with engravings in Egyptian language and contain the genealogy of one of the ancient Jaredites back to Ham the son of Noah. His bones were found in the same vase (made of Cement). Part of the bones were 15 ft. underground."¹⁶

This calls to mind the statement from the William Clayton journal referred to above:

"I have seen six brass plates which were found in Adams County by some persons who were digging in a mound. They found a skeleton about six feet from the surface of the earth which was nine feet high. . . . President J. has translated a portion and says they contain the history of the person with whom they were found, and he was a descendant of Ham through the loins of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and that he received his kingdom from the Ruler of heaven and earth."

It seems, then, that there was considerable talk about the plates

in Nauvoo—and apparently as much misinformation and hearsay was current among people as there was fact. Pratt heard of a discovery in Pike County; Clayton said Adams County. Clayton said that the find was made six feet underground; Pratt, fifteen. Elder Pratt spoke of a cement vase—an item mentioned in no other account. Clayton mentioned a skeleton nine feet tall—also unmentioned in any other account. Clayton said that the plates gave a history of an Egyptian; Pratt mentioned a Jaredite.

The elements that these two accounts have in common suggest a basic gist to the hearsay stories circulating in Nauvoo and also that Joseph Smith with others saw and wondered about the nature of the material that had been brought to Nauvoo. But there is, obviously, leagues of difference between an actual translation of sacred records and a consideration of artifacts of uncertain origin—the former requiring study, prayer, and revelation; the latter characterized perhaps by an examination for points of similarity, etc., in a setting where various suggestions are likely aired by those present and elaborated on as discussion continued. And the actual presence of William Clayton or Parley P. Pratt in any discussion on the topic with Joseph Smith is simply unknown.

It is hard to imagine that the Prophet Joseph Smith wouldn't have been intrigued by the plates. When they were first shown to him, he may well have noted certain correspondence between some characters on the plates and "reformed Egyptian" and contemplated the possibility of authenticity and translation, as the Charlotte Haven letter suggests.¹⁷ But how much of the conjecture that was current in Nauvoo at the time might be attributable to him would be a speculation in itself, impossible to verify from the available ac-

counts. The one account that *was* published in the *Times and Seasons*, whose editors were equally as intimate with Joseph Smith as William Clayton and Parley P. Pratt, could only report that "Mr. Smith has had those plates, what his opinion concerning them is we have not yet ascertained."

The central issue in the whole question of Joseph Smith's involvement in the Kinderhook plate episode is that the expected "translation" did not appear. And this fact may well explain the characteristic that has made this hoax most interesting—that it was never carried to completion. That the Kinderhook plates were not authentic artifacts is no longer in doubt; but if the plates were faked, why wasn't the hoax revealed right away?

It has been suggested that the whole Kinderhook plate incident was, as Wilbur Fugate said in his 1878 and 1879 letters, a heavy-handed, frontier-style "joke." On the other hand, the conspirators' objective might have been more pointed—to produce a bogus set of plates and then reveal the hoax in a shower of ridicule *after* the Prophet made a purported "translation." In either case, they were frustrated in their scheme because no translation ever appeared. In fact, there is no evidence that Joseph Smith ever concluded the plates were genuine, other than conflicting statements from members who hoped that a translation would come forth—and in fact no evidence that the Prophet manifested real interest in the "discovery" after his initial viewing of the plates. The statement taken from William Clayton's journal didn't appear until September 1856 in Salt Lake City's *Deseret News*. At that point, time itself had eroded away the opportunity for a hearty joke, if that were the hoaxers' intent; and the absence of an actual translation in spite of the Clayton entry in the "History of Joseph Smith" could only have added to their

frustrations—assuming that the hoaxers even knew of the *Deseret News* account, which appeared thirteen years later and a thousand miles away.

Another possible explanation for the hoax never having been carried through may lie in Robert Wiley's desire to sell the plates as genuine artifacts. For him to have exposed the hoax before the attempted sale would, of course, have scuttled any negotiations; and to expose it afterward may have landed the sellers and conspirators in jail for attempted fraud—turning the tables and making *them* the object of ridicule instead of Joseph Smith.

Significantly, there is no evidence that the Prophet Joseph Smith ever took up the matter with the Lord, as he did when working with the Book of Mormon and the Book of Abraham. And this brings us to the other side of the story, for those of us who believe that Joseph Smith *was* the Lord's prophet: Isn't it natural to expect that he would be guided to understand that these plates were not of value as far as his mission was concerned? That other members may have been less judicious and not guided in the same way cannot be laid at the Prophet's feet. Many people, now as well as then, have an appetite for hearsay and a hope for "easy evidence" to bolster or even substitute for personal spirituality and hard-won faith that comes from close familiarity with truth and communion with God.

So it is that in the 100-year battle of straw men and straw arguments, Joseph Smith needs no defense—he simply did not fall for the scheme. And with that understood, it is perhaps time that the Kinderhook plates be retired to the limbo of other famous faked antiquities. □

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REFERENCES

1. "Ancient Records," *Times and Seasons*, 1 May 1843, pp. 185-87. The *Times and Seasons* was published twice monthly, dated on the first and fifteenth of the month, no matter what the date of its actual release. This issue, dated Monday, May 1, picked up a story from the *Quincy Whig* that was published on Wednesday, May 3. Obviously it couldn't have been published before the *Whig* story appeared, and in fact the editorial subhead above the story on "Ancient Records" reads "CITY OF NAUVOO, WEDNESDAY, MAY 1, 1843." So the *Times and Seasons* issue in question was printed no earlier than Wednesday, May 3, and possibly a day or so later.
2. The full title is *A Brief Account of the Discovery of the Brass Plates Recently Taken from a Mound in the Vicinity of Kinderhook, Pike County, Illinois*. Available in the Library-Archives, the Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter referred to as Church Archives).
3. The journal referred to is in private possession. Dr. James B. Allen of Brigham Young University used it by permission in connection with his research on William Clayton, and I wish to thank him for sharing this citation with me. Other volumes of William Clayton's journals for other time periods have appeared in print—see, e.g., James B. Allen and Thomas G. Alexander, eds., *Manchester Mormons: The Journal of William Clayton, 1840 to 1842* (Santa Barbara and Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, 1974); William Clayton, *William Clayton's Journal: A Daily Record of the 1846 Journey of the Original Company of "Mormon" Pioneers from Nauvoo, Illinois, to the Valley of the Great Salt Lake* (Salt Lake City: Clayton Family Association, 1921).
4. *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1932-51), 5:372-79. Formerly widely known as the *Documentary History of the Church*.
5. Printed in the *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 5 (July 1912), pp. 271-73.
6. Wilbur Fugate, Mound Station, Illinois, 30 June 1879 letter to James T. Cobb, Salt Lake City, as quoted in Wilhelm W. Wyl (Wymetal), *Mormon Portraits* (Salt Lake City, 1888), pp. 207-8.
7. It would take a separate article to present all the information available on J. N. McDowell, his medical college, his museums, the sack of his museums, and the partial reorganization of his collections after the Civil War by the Academy of Science in St. Louis.
8. For a copy of the affidavit, see Welby W. Ricks, "The Kinderhook Plates," *Improvement Era*, Sept. 1962, p. 636.
9. This excellent and detailed "Kinderhook Plate Report" is on file in the Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University. Other members of the committee were Richard Anderson, William Dibble, Max Weaver, Sam Rushforth, Ronald Jackson, Reed Durham, Larry Pope, Welby Ricks, and Dean Jessee.
10. One other topic that deserves mention is the matter of the size of the Chicago plate in comparison with a description given shortly after the plates' "discovery." Said the *Quincy Whig* article of 3 May 1843 (reprinted in the *Times and Seasons* article and in the *Nauvoo Neighbor* press broadside of June 24): "A Mr. J. Roberts, from Pike county, called upon us last Monday, with a written description of a discovery which was recently made near Kinderhook, in that county." The article went on to describe the discovery, adding: "There were six plates—four inches in length, one inch and three quarters wide at the top, and two inches and three quarters wide at the bottom, flaring out to points." Just what J. Roberts may have had to do with the discovery is unknown (his name appears nowhere else in connection with it), but the figures he gave the *Whig* appear to be estimates only. For in contrast to those estimates, which come to us second-hand, the tracings in the Clayton and Brigham Young journals, as well as the broadside facsimiles, all match the Chicago plate in size.
11. See note 1, above.
12. Charlotte Haven, "A Girl's Letters from Nauvoo," *The Overland Monthly*, 16 (Dec. 1890), p. 630. This letter is dated: "City of Nauvoo, May 2, 1843."
13. Brigham Young papers, Church Archives. I wish to thank Dean C. Jessee of the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute of Church History, Brigham Young University, for calling this item to my attention.
14. *History of the Church*, 5:384.
15. See *History of the Church*, 5:384ff.
16. The original of this letter is in the John Van Cott correspondence, Church Archives.
17. It would also take a separate article to discuss the amazing array of theories that have been put forward to explain the source or nature of the characters on the Kinderhook plates. It has been suggested at various times that they came from a Chinese tea chest, from a piece of Chinese jade jewelry, from the Lo Lo script of Yunnan, China, from Egyptian hieroglyphics, and from scripts originating in Crete, Cyprus, Sinai, Canaan, Byblos, Phoenicia, and elsewhere, including the Anthon transcript (a theory that must be discounted because no published version of the Anthon transcript was available at that time). Some have suggested that the characters derived from nothing but a lively imagination. The arrangement of the characters and the paucity of repeated signs and sign clusters does not suggest any real language.

Epigraphic Society Report
on Kinderhook plates
Barry Fell
June 1984

The Epigraphic Society

Volume 12, No. 299

June 1984

Occasional Publications

The Kinderhook Plates

Barry Fell

President, Epigraphic Society; Honorary Fellow,
Sociedade Portuguesa de Antropologia e Etnologia

Dear Dr Fell:

Enclosed are facsimiles of six plates, enscribed on both sides, that were found near Kinderhook, Pike County, Illinois on April 23, in the year 1843. The facsimiles I have enclosed are from History of the Church, Volume V, by Joseph Smith, published by Deseret Book Company in Salt Lake City, Utah. The material accompanying the facsimiles gives a clear account of the circumstances surrounding the discovery of the six plates, including the controversy concerning their authenticity. The Times and Seasons referred to was a Mormon newspaper; the Quincy Whig was a local secular newspaper. The note at the foot of page 378 is by B. H. Roberts, editor of the book. So far as I can tell, there is no written translation of these plates, although Joseph Smith did indicate that the plates related to someone of Egyptian ancestry.

I would be interested in your views on the enclosed materials. Thank you for your time in considering these materials.

February 20, 1977

Very truly yours
Scott Young (Livermore, CA).

From The Times and Seasons

We, the citizens of Kinderhook, whose names are annexed, do certify and declare that on the 23rd of April, 1843, while excavating a large mound in this vicinity, Mr. R. Wiley took from said mound *six brass plates* of a bell shape, covered with ancient characters. Said plates were very much oxydated. The bands and rings on said plates mouldered into dust on a slight pressure.

ROBERT WILEY,
FAYETTE GRUBB,
J. R. SHARP,

W. LONGNECKER,
W. FUGATE.
G. W. F. WARD,

GEO. DECKENSON,
W. P. HARRIS,
IRA S. CURTIS,

Wishing that the world might know the hidden things as fast as they come to light, I was induced to state the facts, hoping that you would give it an insertion in your excellent paper; for we all feel anxious to know the true meaning of the plates, and publishing the facts might lead to the true translation.

They were found, I judged, more than twelve feet below the surface of the top of the mound.

I am, most respectfully, a citizen of Kinderhook,

W. P. HARRIS, M. D.

(From the *Quincy Whig*.)

SINGULAR DISCOVERY.—MATERIAL FOR ANOTHER MORMON BOOK.

A Mr. J. Roberts of Pike County, called upon us last Monday with a written description of a discovery which was recently made near Kinderhook, in that county. We have not room for his communication at length, and will give so much of a summary of it, as will enable the reader to form a pretty correct opinion of the discovery made.

It appeared that a young man by the name of Wiley, a resident in Kinderhook, dreamed three nights in succession, that in a certain mound in the vicinity, there were treasures concealed. Impressed with the strange occurrence of dreaming the same dream three nights in succession, he came to the conclusion to satisfy his mind by digging into the mound. For fear of being laughed at, if he made others acquainted with his design he went by himself and labored diligently one day in pursuit of the supposed treasure, by sinking a hole in the centre of a mound.

Finding it quite laborious, he invited others to assist him. A company of ten or twelve repaired to the mound and assisted in digging out the shaft commenced by Wiley. After penetrating the mound about eleven feet, they came to a bed of limestone that had been subjected to the action of fire. They removed the stones, which were small and easy to handle, to the depth of two feet more, when they found *six brass plates*, secured and fastened together by two iron wires, but which were so decayed that they readily crumbled to dust upon being handled.

The plates were so completely covered with rust as almost to obliterate

ate the characters inscribed upon them; but, after undergoing a chemical process, the inscriptions were brought out plain and distinct.

There were six plates, four inches in length, one inch and three-quarters wide at the top, and two inches and three-quarters wide at the bottom, flaring out to points. There are four lines of characters or hieroglyphics on each. On one side of the plates are parallel lines running lengthways.

By whom these plates were deposited there must ever remain a secret, unless some one skilled in deciphering hieroglyphics may be found to unravel the mystery. Some pretend to say that Smith, the Mormon leader, has the ability to read them. If he has, he will confer a great favor on the public by removing the mystery which hangs over them. A person present when the plates were found remarked that it would go to prove the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, which it undoubtedly will.

In the place where these plates were deposited were also found human bones in the last stage of decomposition. There were but few bones found; and it is believed that it was but the burial-place of a person or family of distinction in ages long gone by, and that these plates contain the history of the times, or of a people that existed far, far beyond the memory of the present race. But we will not conjecture anything about this wonderful discovery, as it is one which the plates alone can reveal.

The plates above alluded to were exhibited in this city last week, and are now, we understand, in Nauvoo, subject to the inspection of the Mormon Prophet. The public curiosity is greatly excited; and if Smith can decipher the hieroglyphics on the plates, he will do more towards throwing light on the early history of this continent than any man now living.*

Footnote by B. H. Roberts

* It is proper here to call attention to the fact that the genuineness of this discovery of the Kinderhook plates is questioned by some anti-Mormon writers, among them Professor William A. Linn in his late work *The Story of Mormonism*. In which, after citing the fact that both John Hyde and T. B. H. Stenhouse—both anti-Mormon authors—accept the genuineness of the discovery of the Kinderhook plates, which led the first in his *Mormonism* to insist that "Smith did have plates of some kind," in connection with the putting forth of the Book of Mormon; and

the second to say of the Kinderhook plates that they were "actually and unquestionably discovered by one Mr. R. Wiley"—he says:

"But the true story of the Kinderhook plates was disclosed by an affidavit made by W. Fugate of Mound Station, Brown county, Illinois, before Jay Brown, justice of the peace, on June 30, 1879. In this he stated that the plates were a humbug, gotten up by Robert Wiley, Bridge Whitton, and myself. Whitton (who was a blacksmith) cut the plates out of some pieces of copper; Wiley and I made the hieroglyphics by making impressions on beeswax and filling them with acid, old iron and lead, and bound them with a piece of hoop iron, covering them completely with the rust. He describes the burial of the plates and their digging up, among the spectators of the latter being two Mormon Elders, Marsh and Sharp. Sharp declared that the Lord had directed them to witness the digging. The plates were borrowed and shown to Smith, and were finally given to one Professor McDowell of St. Louis, for his museum." (*The Story of the Mormons*, Linn, p. 87.)

Of this presentation of the matter it is only necessary to say that it is a little singular that Mr. Fugate alone out of the three said to be in collusion in perpetrating the fraud should disclose it, and that he should wait from 1843 to 1879—a period of thirty-six years—before doing so, when he and those said to be associated with him had such an excellent opportunity to expose the vain pretensions of the Prophet—If Fugate's tale be true—during his life time. For while the statement in the text of the Prophet's journal to the effect that the find was genuine, and that he had translated some of the characters and learned certain historical facts concerning the person with whose remains the plates were found, may not have been known at the time to the alleged conspirators to deceive him still it is quite apparent that the editor of the *Times and Seasons*—John Taylor, the close personal friend of the Prophet—took the find seriously, and expressed implicit confidence in his editorial that the Prophet could give a translation of the plates. And this attitude the Church, continued to maintain; for in *The Prophet*, (a Mormon weekly periodical, published in New York) of the 15th of February, 1845, there was published a *fac-simile* of the Kinderhook plates, together with the *Times and Seasons* editorial and all the above matter of the text. How easy to have covered Joseph Smith and his followers with ridicule by proclaiming the hoax as soon as they accepted the Kinderhook plates as genuine! Why was it not done? The fact that Fugate's story was not told until thirty-six years after the event, and that he alone of all those who were connected with the event gives that version of it, is rather strong evidence that his story is the hoax, not the discovery of the plates, nor the engravings upon them.

"The plates," says Professor Linn, "were finally given to one 'Professor' McDowell of St. Louis, for his museum." This on the authority of *Wyl's Mormon Portraits*, (p. 207). And Professor Linn in a note adds: "The secretary of the Missouri Historical Society writes me that McDowell's museum disappeared some time ago, most of its contents being lost or stolen, and the fate of the Kinderhook plates cannot be ascertained." (*Story of the Mormons*, p. 87 and footnote.)

Report by Barry Fell

The Chicago Historical Society now owns one of the plates and it matches the facsimile of one side of plate 5 of the foregoing records. Thus even though the other plates are lost, the facsimiles may be taken as correct and the signs on them subjected to epigraphic analysis. My findings are as follow:-

(1) Individual surfaces of the plates carry heterochronous mixtures of signs of widely different periods and sources. For example side 6A on page 137 has some Phoenician letters combined with miscellaneous squiggles plus the signs for dollars and cents; the former were in use about 2000 years ago, the latter were invented by Act of Congress in 1789. The facts are consistent with the claim by W. Fugate that he engraved these markings, aided by others named.

(2) A review of the facsimiles discloses that the sum total of these markings includes Phoenician, Greek, Latin and Hebrew letters, to which are added numerous unidentifiable signs, numerals of the Arabic & Latin systems, mathematical symbols, signs of the zodiac, etc. If these convey any concealed message, it can only be one of modern origin.

(3) When the Latin signs are isolated, they prove to include letters that are diagnostic of the English language, namely the association with one another of the letters F, J, K, V, W, Y and at the same time letters of high frequency in other languages that use Latin signs, are lacking. By this means, use of the recognition tables (as of Mario Pei) and frequency tables, I conclude that the only language likely to be concealed in the jumbled Latin signs has to be English. Specifically excluded by the data are: Welsh, Breton, Gaelic, Finnish, Turkish, Albanian, Hungarian & all the Romance, Slav and Teutonic tongues (save only English).

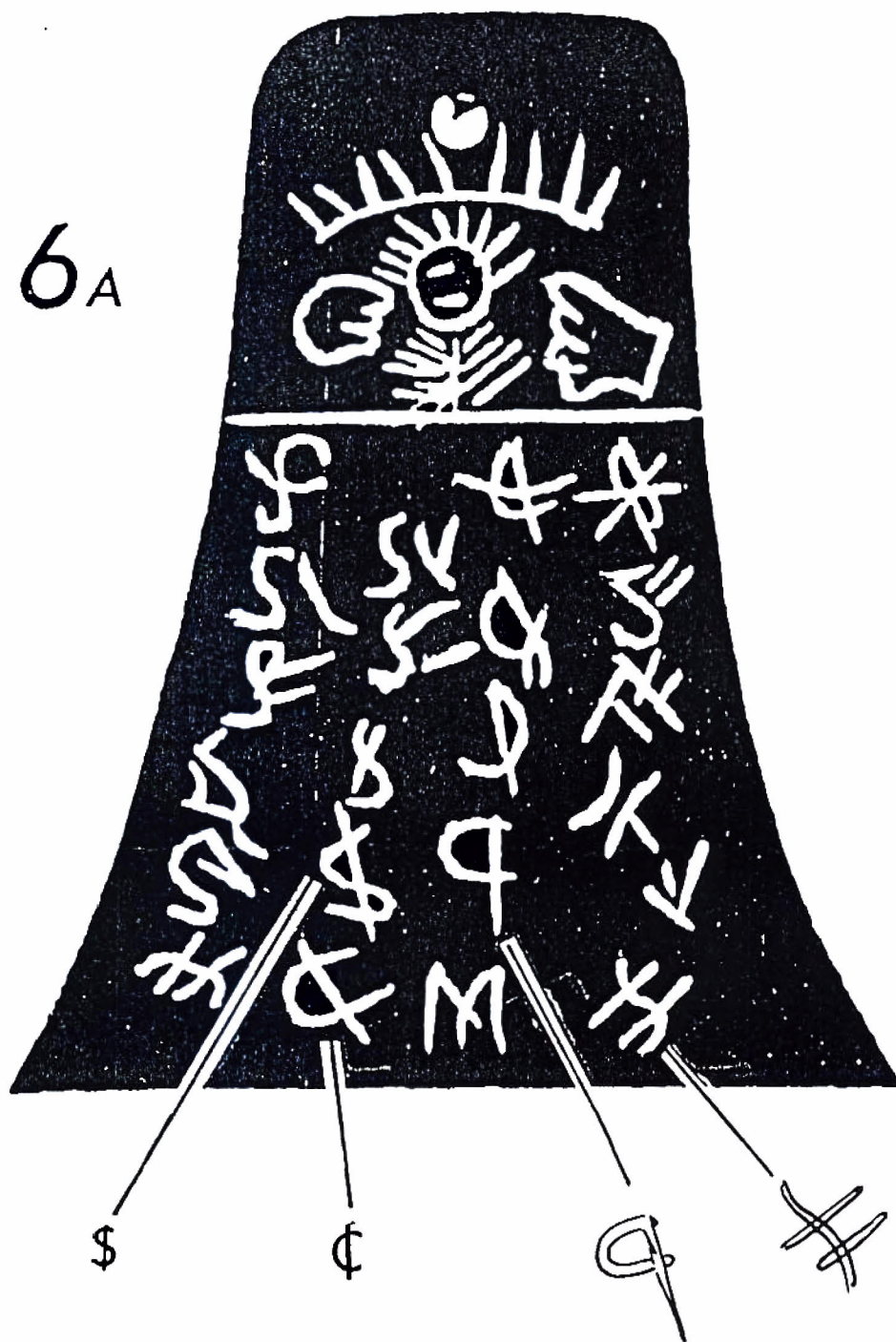
(4) I therefore examined the sets of Latin letters on the several illustrated plates, and found that they yield letter sequences that, if in correct sequence, spell out the message

W. Fugate's Fakes	(Side 1A)
April Fool's Day	(Side 3A)
1843 For	(Side 2A)
Joseph Smith	(Sides 6B and 1B)

Pages 137-141 illustrate this finding.

Barry Fell
January 1984

6A

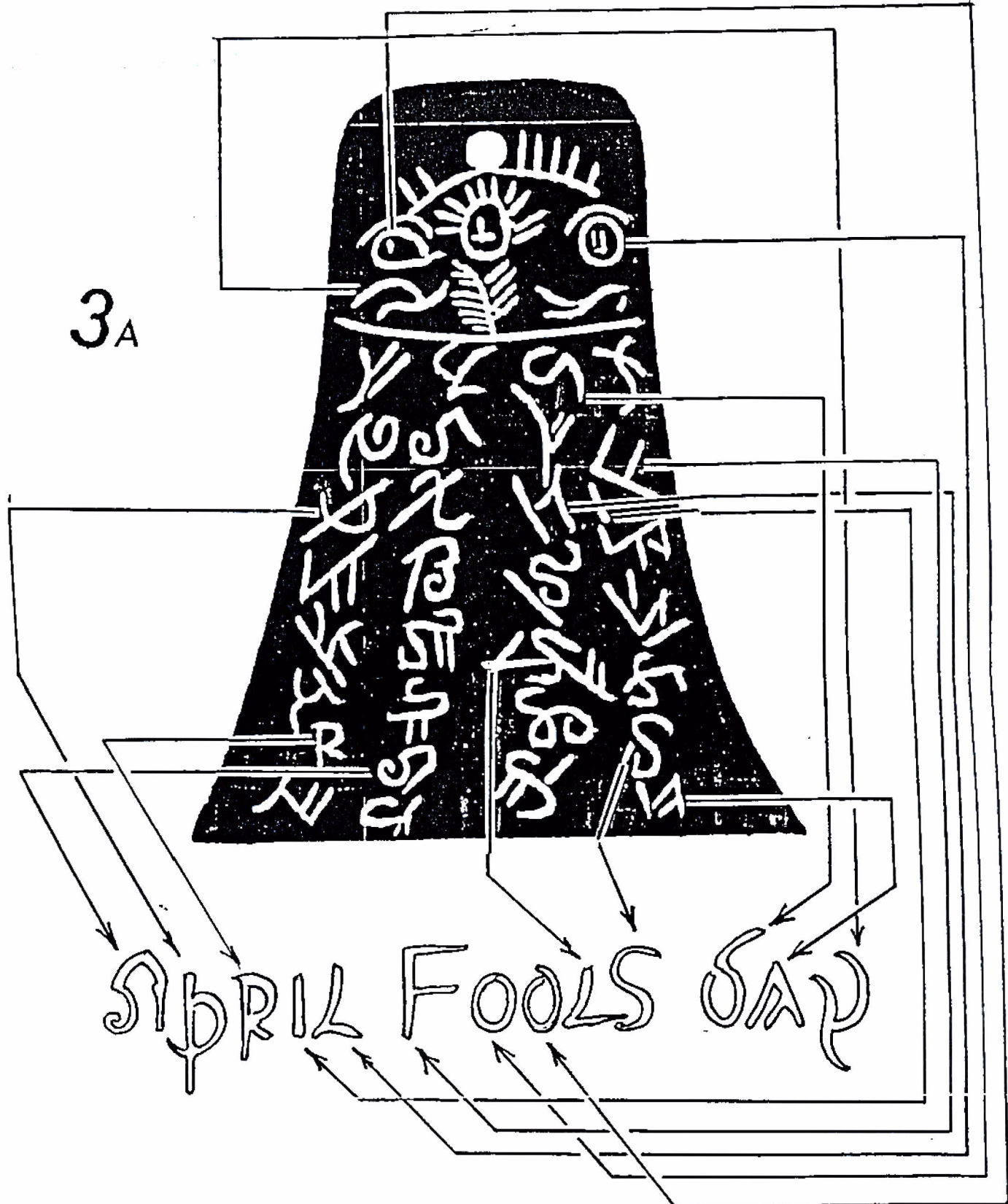


Gross anachronism is illustrated by Plate 6A (by the Mormon numbering), where late Punic letters resh and aleph appear with the forms last used around 200 A.D., together with modern American symbols of account, the \$ and ¢, first employed in 1789. Prior to that date accounts were kept in units of one-ninetieth of the Spanish dollar; the word cent was first proposed as the name of a coin in August 1786 (Ord. Continental Congress U. S., 8). The plate cannot therefore be ancient and is in fact a modern artifact, as claimed by W. Fugate, whose name is concealed on Plate number 1A.

1A



3A



2_A